Soccer Today!

SOCCER TODAY
637011800001

$A3.80
INC GST
THURSDAY
11 APRIL 2002

$A4.80
inc GST
IN WEST
AUSTRALIA

VOLUME 1
No. 13

DISTRIBUTION BY WRAPAWAY
(02) 9550 1622
PRODUCED BY ROYAL PUBLISHING
(02) 9588 6533
royal_publishing@yahoo.com.au

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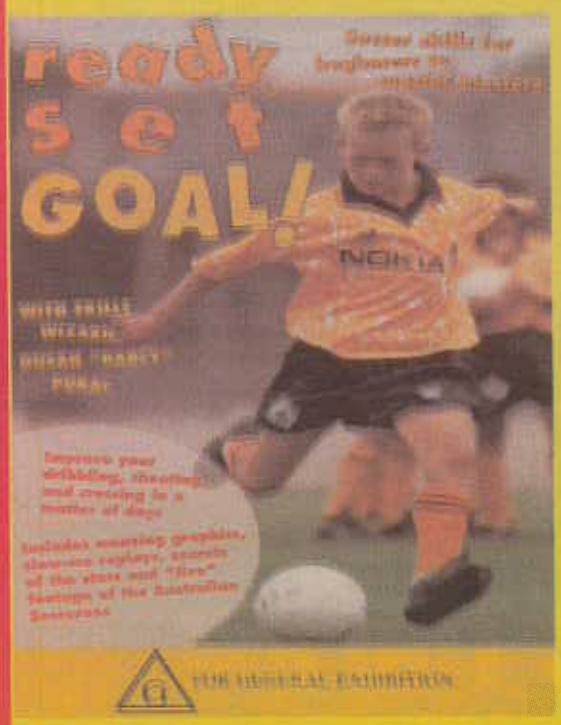

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Sharks maestro Halpin in doubt for Knights clash ... Milicic ready to fire

OLYMPIC Sharks look certain to be without creative midfielder Troy Halpin for the first leg of their National Soccer League elimination series against the Melbourne Knights at Somers Street on Sunday.

The mercurial Halpin, who has been playing most of the season with an osteitis pubis injury, received a cortisone injection last Wednesday and needs ten days rest before he resumes training.

There was better news for the rest of the team with former Socceroos defender Steve Laybutt almost fully recovered from his hip flexor injury while midfielders Wayne Shroj and the lively Hiroyuki Ishida are also expected to play.

Coach Gary Phillips admitted Halpin, who can win a game almost single-handedly with a piece of brilliance or be missing for large portions of a game, should have been operated on during the year but the club feared his loss.

Halpin is thought of in such regard that he's been allowed to virtually do all his own training and while there's been a few rumblings at the club about his freedom off the paddock, Phillips insists his teammates are okay with the situation.

"With his quality I'm happy to let him do his own thing and speaking to players they'll tell you the same thing - they'd rather see him playing than have him sit on the bench," Phillips said.

The Sharks have built most of their season on a frugal defence - conceeding just 24 goals, while their attack has proved frustrating with Ante Milicic (seven goals) top scorer for the club after just six games.

Phillips said this factor, as well as attitude and preparation were the key issues affecting Olympic's finals chances.

"If we had (Perth strikers Damian) Mori and (Bobby Despotovski) I have no doubt that we'd be up where they are."

"But we have to deal with what we've got.

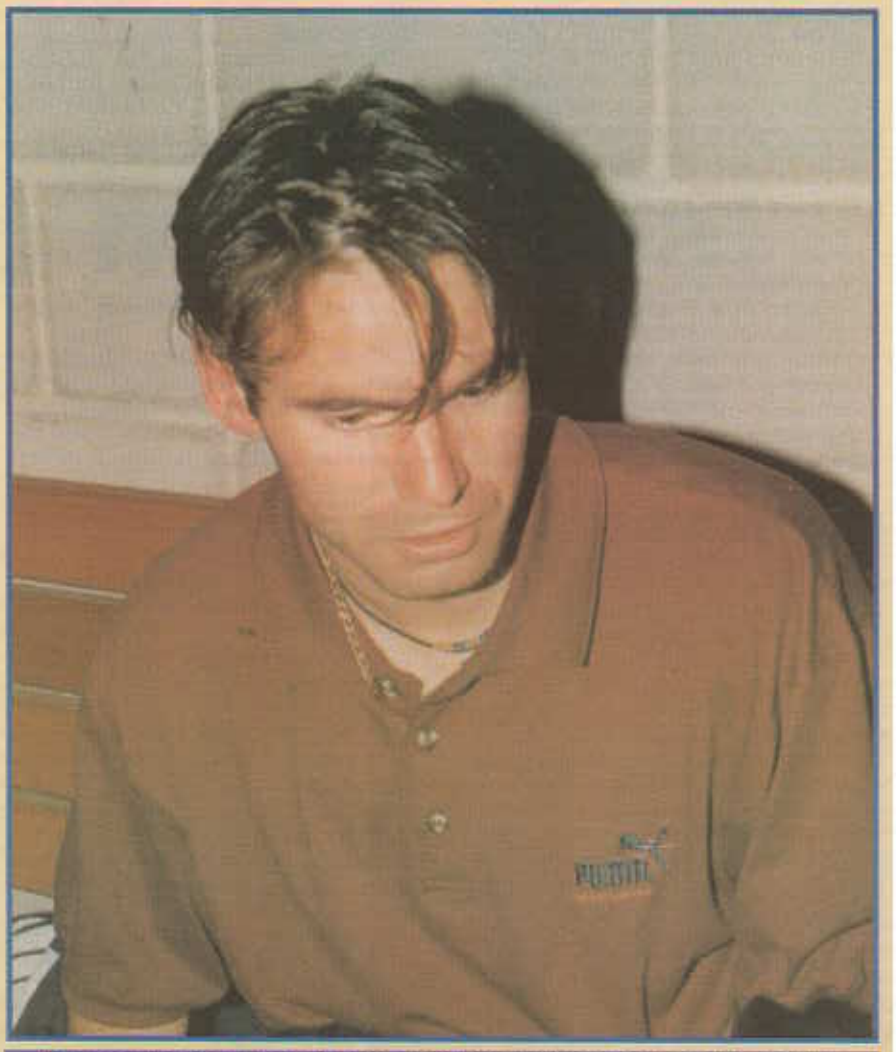
"There's no magic formula but what we have to address is how we've gone into some games and the way we've prepared for games as far as attitude throughout the week and even in the dressing room at the game.

"Sometimes no matter what you do it's very difficult to change that but I hope the occasion will be enough for them."

Phillips, who joined the club just a week before the start of the season when Branko Culina was sacked, has another year left on his contract and said he's "led to believe" it will be honoured regardless of finals results.

"There's never a dull moment. You can win six on the trot and they're (management) still not happy but then you lose one and they say 'you've played well'. Sometimes they're hard to figure out but that's football."

AAP



Ace goalscorer Ante Milicic will be seeking his eighth goal in seven games for the Sharks ...

COVER PHOTO by Tina Asprea
MODELS courtesy of Wendy McMahon

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FIFA plunged into crisis as civil war rages

By Mike COLLETT

LONDON, England - The private civil war that has engulfed FIFA for at least the last four years finally came crashing out into the open today, plunging world soccer's governing body into yet another major crisis.

With less than two months to go before the start of the World Cup finals and the FIFA presidential election, the CONCACAF Confederation has called for the resignation of FIFA's General Secretary Michel Zen-Ruffinen.

They claim he has exceeded his authority, gone against the wishes of FIFA president Sepp Blatter and the Executive Committee and interfered in the affairs of the Confederation, which he is not entitled to do.

It is believed this is the first time in FIFA's 98-year history that any Confederation has accused FIFA's senior paid official in such a way.

In a sensational statement signed by CONCACAF's own American general secretary, Chuck Blazer -- himself a member of FIFA's Executive Committee and a staunch ally of Blatter -- CONCACAF have called for Zen-Ruffinen to resign, and, if he does not do so, for Blatter to suspend him.

Blazer said in the statement: "This current action by Zen-Ruffinen has stretched his credibility to the limit, by taking a position on the basis of hand-picked members contacting him and waiting for the President to be out of FIFA House en route to Africa, before unilaterally overturning the decision of the Executive Committee."

CONCACAF, whose president Jack Warner is not only a FIFA vice-president but one of Blatter's strongest supporters, is furious with Zen-Ruffinen for what they claim is his interference in their own presidential election crisis.

On the surface the problem is this:

Warner and Blazer have ruled that Mexican Dr Edgardo Codesal Mendez should not be allowed to oppose Warner in CONCACAF's presidential election in Miami on April 20 as he is a paid employee of CONCACAF.

When the matter was referred to FIFA, a decision was taken by the Executive Committee on March 8 that it was not a matter for FIFA to resolve but the Confederation.

But Zen-Ruffinen took a different view.

He said that as there had been a formal request from Mexico to examine the case and other executive committee members had expressed the same view, he was duty-bound, after studying FIFA's statutes, to bring the matter before FIFA's Bureau for Legal Matters.

CONCACAF may well feel aggrieved, and legally may or may not have precedent on their side, but far deeper wounds have been uncovered by their action, which publicly exposes for the first time just how bitter the long-running civil war at the heart of FIFA has become.

Those interested in the internal workings of FIFA have known for years that the Executive Committee was split into pro and anti-Blatter camps.

The fact that Issa Hayatou, the president of the African Confederation (CAF) is standing against Blatter at the forthcoming FIFA Congress on May 29, has given Blatter's detractors new heart following his defeat of UEFA president Lennart Johansson in the 1998 election in Paris.

It was after that election that Zen-Ruffinen succeeded Blatter as FIFA's general secretary, but although both men are Swiss and come from the same canton there is little love lost between them.

Blatter has rarely missed an opportunity to attack Zen-Ruffinen, now 43 and a former international referee, and the divide between them has plagued operations at FIFA House for years.

But Blatter has had more than just his poor relationship with Zen-Ruffinen to worry about.

His presidency has been plagued by controversy almost from the day he won the election.

There have been never-ending rumours that his supporters bought the votes that enabled him to beat Johansson by the unexpectedly wide margin of 31 votes.

More recently, the collapse of FIFA's long-term marketing partner ISL-ISMM last year with massive debts and his reluctance to allow an inquiry into FIFA's financial situation alienated some members of the Executive Committee still further.

New allegations have recently been made regarding irregularities in the way a number of senior FIFA officials have conducted themselves and Blatter appears to be constantly fighting off allegations of bribery, corruption or wrongdoing -- none of which have ever been proved.

As if Monday's developments out of the Americas were not bad enough for FIFA, more was to come.

FIFA may be fighting a civil war but for players like Italy's Christian Vieri (above) next month's World Cup is all they're focused on.

Dr Chung Mong-joon, another FIFA vice-president opposed to Blatter's reign, said in an interview in Australia that it was time for Blatter's presidency to end.

In a stinging attack Dr Chung said Blatter had to be removed as president if the sport was to regain its image after months of scandal.

In an interview broadcast on Australian television Chung reiterated his support for Hayatou to take over from Blatter in the top job at next month's election.

"I think Issa Hayatou can introduce new leadership to FIFA," said Chu who had considered running agai Blatter himself before lending his su port to the African.

"Mr Blatter is a smart man but t point is the former president of FI Joao Havelange, ruled FIFA for years and the incumbent Blatter h been working under Havelang chairmanship for such a long time.

"From this perspective, Mr Blatte presidency is a continuation Havelange's presidency so I think i high time for FIFA to introduce ne leadership."

Farina named Expo ambassador

SOCCEROO coach Frank Farina has been appointed ambassador for the Telstra International Soccer Expo that will be held at the State Sports Centre at Sydney's Olympic Park between May 17-19.

The Telstra International Soccer Expo is the showcase event for Australia's soccer industry and will feature special soccer exhibitors, specialist coaching clinics, heart-pumping schools tournaments and guest appearances from international stars.

The Telstra International Soccer Expo is fully endorsed by Soccer Australia, the NSW Soccer Federation and the NSW Amateur Soccer Federation.

Farina represented Australia on 86 occasions at all levels and has since carved out a successful coaching career which involved guiding the Brisbane Strikers to winning the 1996-97 National Soccer League championship and his recent re-appointment as Senior National Coach of the Soccerqos.

Telstra International Soccer Expo organiser, Carolyn Ledowsky, said Farina's appointment reflects the events importance and level of support.

"The Telstra International Soccer Expo continues to be an very important event in the promotion of soccer in Australia," said Ms Ledowsky.

"No other sport in Australia conducts such an intense three day Expo which appeals to all male and female participants and age demographics.

"Apart from being the public face of the Expo, Frank will be involved in specialist coaching clinics," added Ms Ledowsky.

Farina said his involvement in the Expo was important for the continued development of soccer in Australia.

"Soccer continues to thrive and prosper at a grassroots level and the Expo provides an excellent forum for those participants to come together in a single event," said Farina.

"The Expo also provides great exposure to the NSL clubs and to various other soccer elements such as Futsal.

"The Expo will also see soccer fans seeing Australia's leading players involved in soccer clinics and autograph signing sessions," he added.

The Telstra International Soccer Expo is being staged for the fourth consecutive year and is again being well supported by companies, clubs and other exhibitors.

Ms Ledowsky said interest in soccer will be peaking in May with the FIFA World Cup to be staged in Korea and Japan commencing on May 31.

Courtesy Soccer Australia

Kingz due to make final decision on Boutsianis

THE KINGZ were due to decide on Tuesday whether to take legal action against South Melbourne over the transfer of Con Boutsianis.

Club director Chris Turner, who is also bidding to become its owner as well, said the Kingz are looking into their options after the February match against South Melbourne when Boutsianis played even though an agreement was in place saying he wouldn't.

When Boutsianis ended an unhappy time at the Kingz the Auckland-based club put a clause in the transfer that he not play for South a week later when the two teams met.

But South reneged on the deal, claiming the Kingz had broken the agreement by publicising details of the transfer, and when Boutsianis played he scored the late winner that sparked a winning run that took his team from last all the way into the finals.

The Kingz are unhappy that after initially being charged by the NSL with bringing the game into disrepute, South was found to have no case to answer when Soccer Australia stepped in and closed the matter.

The governing body added at the time of its finding that it was an issue to be sorted out by the two clubs, not the league, and since then the Kingz have several times threatened to issue legal proceedings.

If South was to lose the three points it gained in the match against the Kingz it would also be tipped out of the finals in favour of the Parramatta Power, but while Turner doesn't want to affect the playoffs, he says he can't guarantee not to if action is taken.

"We're clearly not in the business of trying to disrupt the finals," Turner said. "It's no skin off our nose whether South Melbourne, Parramatta or whoever makes the finals because we weren't good enough to get in ourselves.

"But the issue is that a club played a player they shouldn't have played and the correct process of going to a tribunal hasn't taken place. Why has this not been addressed? This issue has to be addressed."

The Kingz board will meet on Monday evening and possibly again on Tuesday morning to decide whether to put the matter to rest or take it to court.

"I would hope that by tomorrow afternoon, we'll be able to make a comment on what we will be doing," Turner said.

While Power general manager Angela Travis ruled out any possible action by her club on Sunday evening, Parramatta would no doubt be happy to benefit should the Kingz go ahead.

Con Boutsianis: at the heart of the Finals controversy

The Kingz are also trying to convince Soccer Australia to approve an owner ship change, in which Turner and Kiwi businessman Ted Midlane would take over a 90 percent shareholding in the club from Sky Television.

Soccer Australia's board will have the final say on the change of ownership.

SPIRIT STEPS UP PLANS TO LURE YOUNG RANGERS ACE

By David Mason

NORTHERN SPIRIT will step up its plans to lure Rangers striker Stephen Dobbie to the club for next season after he played a leading role in a 5-2 thrashing of Wollongong Wolves at North Sydney Oval on Sunday afternoon.

Dobbie scored the first goal, had a hand in another and peppered the Wollongong goal with shots as Northern Spirit completely outclassed the defending NSL premiers.

The 19-year-old formed a very strong partnership with Pablo Cardozo, who scored two goals and was extremely unlucky not to grab a hat-trick with the pair running off each other and forming a bond that would significantly boost Spirit's hopes for next season if the Scottish teenager stays for a full season.

With Rangers Director of Football Dick Advocaat watching in the stands as part of his whirlwind tour of the Northern Spirit operation, Dobbie combined silky skills and a cool head in front of goal in a mouth watering performance.

"We have spoken to Rangers about having Steve for next season and we spoke with Dick Advocaat at length about it today," said Northern Spirit General Manager Colin Mitchell.

"He would be an asset to the club and it is fair to say that we are chasing hard to have him stay for the entire season next year."

Mitchell wasn't alone in his desire to have Dobbie remain in a Spirit shirt with Northern Spirit Coach Mick Hickman also pushing hard to have the teenager at North Sydney Oval next season.

And what about the man himself: "I'd like to stay," Dobbie said. "I have really enjoyed it here.

"I have enjoyed myself, the players have been good to me and the fans were brilliant today.

"It is a good atmosphere and I would like to stay.

"I guess it is up to Rangers to see what they want to do."

While Northern Spirit's display was as dominant as it was entertaining, it was not enough to get the side into the top six with South Melbourne wrapping up 6th place with a 3-1 win over Marconi on Friday night.

David Mason is Northern Spirit's Media Manager

Blatter deputy says Australian World Cup campaign should include Asia

VICE PRESIDENT of world soccer's controlling body Chung Mong-Joon cast doubts on FIFA president Sepp Blatter's promise to support direct World Cup entry to the winner of the Oceania conference.

Blatter, who is up for re-election, has repeatedly expressed support to send the Oceania champion, which last year was Australia, directly to the World Cup finals.

However Korean Dr Chung - who supports Blatter's bitter rival for FIFA's top job, Issa Hayatou of Cameroon - suggested in an SBS television interview the promise may be a political manoeuvre.

"I do not know that Blatter is supporting Oceania's direct entry into the World Cup," Dr Chung said.

"He might have said so because he's much interested in the election more than the global football."

Dr Chung suggested that instead of the Oceania winner playing a South American nation, an arrangement under which Uruguay crushed Australia's World Cup dreams this year, it should take on an Asian country.

If Oceania could "demonstrate the level of its football" in this scenario, Dr Chung thought Oceania's best should get a direct passage into the World Cup after that.

Dr Chung spoke out strongly for a change in FIFA'S leadership and accused FIFA of breaking its own rules by putting up the revenue of the 2002 and 2006 World Cups as collateral for a $US420 million ($A803 million) loan.

"Many people are seriously concerned about such a development," Dr Chung said.

The election for the FIFA presidency will be held in Seoul on May 29.

AAP

TALKING SOCCER WITH ALEX TOBIN

The season's over but its been enjoyable

ALEX Tobin is Australia's most capped international player and since making his National League debut for Adelaide City in 1984, he has played more NSL games than anyone. Now into his second season as Parramatta Power skipper, Tobin continues to set records that are unlikely to be broken. This week Alex offers SOCCER TODAY readers his thoughts on the Kingz situation and the upcoming Top Six series.

WITH the Football Kingz announcing that they will not be taking court action against South Melbourne over the Boutsianis saga, our season is officially over.

Our last training session on Tuesday was a positive end to what has been somewhat of a frustrating year.

Probably the most frustrating thing this season has been our ability to beat the higher teams yet being unable to repeat these types of performances against the lower teams.

It certainly makes you wonder what could have been this season.

On a positive note our finish to the season was first class and the mood within the camp is extremely upbeat despite not making the finals.

We were all disappointed when the news came in that the Kingz were not taking legal action, but I think deep down we all knew at the start of the week that we would've been lucky to sneak into the Top Six.

At the end of the day we didn't make the Top Six, it's that simple.

We can look back at results that have cost us, and games that we should've won, but ultimately we as a group only have ourselves to blame.

It's probably a common feature for sides who just finished outside the finals to look back on what might've been, but there were still a lot of positives to come out of this season.

Most notably would be the development of the younger players in the side, who have really made a name for themselves this season.

Last week against the Knights, two of our scorers were youngsters Adam Kwasnik and Brett Holman, who have shown their potential on a number of occasions throughout the season.

These are just two of a handful of guys who will only go onto bigger and better things in the future.

THE FINALS series looks to be a fairly open contest, although Perth Glory are deserved favourites to claim their first title. It was an interesting decision by Perth to decide to host the first leg of the final, when most sides choose to play the first leg away from home.

The decision may have been swayed by the fact that Newcastle had the bye in the last round of the competition and going into the match United will be in the difficult position of not having played a game in three weeks.

Having to travel to Perth to play in front of what is sure to be a huge and hostile crowd, will be a daunting challenge especially when they've gone so long without a competitive hit-out.

Still Newcastle are a very good side, but it will be interesting to see how long it takes them to get back into the swing of things.

South Melbourne and Brisbane looks to be an even money contest, with South being the hottest side in the league compared to Brisbane who have been consistent all year round.

South will head into the match full of confidence, and have plenty of experienced players who know what to expect in finals matches.

As most people are aware finals football is a different experience. The tension and drama can really be felt, and it makes for great entertainment, so I strongly suggest that you get out there and catch some of the action.

Power action man Ahmad Elrich

Finally I'd like to sign off, by commenting on what a great time I had with all the boys from the Power this season.

Although our last session was a few days back, we're all looking forward to a relaxing day at the races this weekend, where we can get together and have a beer and look back upon the season that was.

Zane heading to Belgium champions Anderlecht

By Paul Mulvey and AFP

LONDON, England - AUSTRALIA international striker Clayton Zane on Monday signed a four-year contract with Belgian side Anderlecht, the Belga news agency reported.

Zane, 24, currently plays in Norway for Lillestrom, which he joined in 1999 from Molde after spending his early career at Australian clubs Newcastle Breakers and Northern Spirit.

He was top scorer with Lillestrom with 17 goals last season and has played 16 times for the Australian national team scoring the winning goal when the Socceroos defeated world champion France in the Confederations Cup in South Korea in June.

Zane hopes the move will boost his chances of establishing a permanent place in Frank Farina's national set-up.

The top scorer in Norway's Tippeliga last season with 16 goals for Lillestrom, Zane was anxious to move to a bigger league where he would receive more exposure and the opportunity to play in European competition.

"Hopefully it all goes well," Zane said.

"This is a great opportunity.

"I never thought I would ever get the chance with such a big club on mainland Europe, this is definitely a big step for me.

"I was disappointed last year when I missed out on the World Cup qualifiers initially.

"One of the main reasons for that was because of the league I was playing in.

"The Norwegian league doesn't really get much recognition, that hindered my chances a bit."

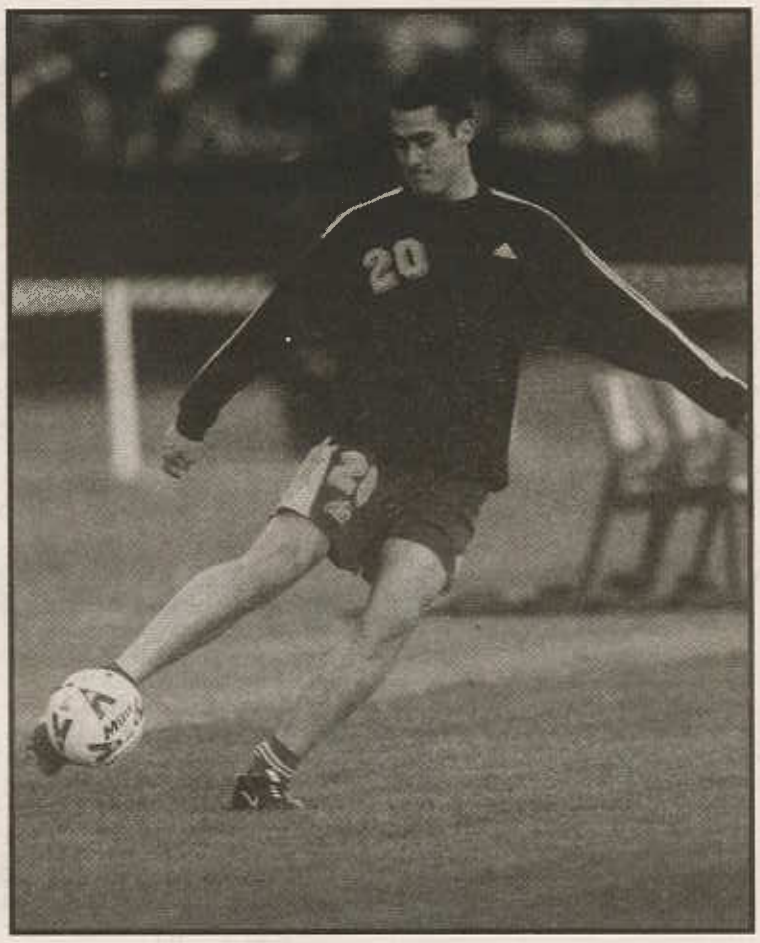
The 23-year-old former Newcastle Breakers and Northern Spirit striker scored Australia's winning goal against world champion France in the Confederations Cup last year but was overlooked when Farina picked his squad for the fateful qualifiers against Uruguay.

He was eventually called into the squad after injuries to Lucas Neill and Hayden Foxe, but he wants to become an automatic choice and add to his 16 caps.

The only possible hurdle which could interrupt the deal arises from Norway's summer season.

Because of the cold of Norway's winter, the 2002 Tippeliga season starts next week, while most European leagues still have a month to go of their current seasons.

Zane may have to play the first two months of the new season for Lillestrom before moving to Belgium and the deal is believed to be worth between $A3million and $A4million for the financially battling club.



MATILDAS DRAW OPENERS IN FRANCE

AUSTRALIA has drawn both its opening matches at the women's Tournoi International De France in France.

The Matildas drew 0-0 with Canada at Poitiers and then conceded a late goal in a 1-1 draw with Japan at Angoulene.

Australia was due to play host nation France in the final match as Soccer Today went to press.

Against Canada, Australia attempted to play a dynamic, attacking style of football when in possession, and both teams created half chances on goal early in the game.

The North Americans then came out stronger after an injury delay and the Matildas were forced to defend for much of the game against a threatening attack led by star creator Charmaine Hooper.

Australia's defensive unit was equal to the task, soaking up the pressure of Canada's sustained efforts on goal which included six corners and ten free kicks.

Australia's best chance came in the second half, a flowing string of six consecutive one-touch passes opening a path on goal but the final shot was not to match.

Defenders Bridgette Starr and Kate McShea, and midfielder Joanne Peters performed well for the Matildas in an all-round team effort.

National Coach Adrian Santrac was pleased with the side's first game on tour, saying, "Overall it was a solid performance and we are content with the result. The team performed well under difficult conditions."

Against Japan, the Matildas took the lead in the 31st minute through a free kick, with Joanne Peters providing Kelly Golebiowski the opportunity to volley home from 20 metres.

Australia was unable to add to its tally from a number of chances, before the spirited Japanese were rewarded for their efforts with a minute remaining in the game. A free kick from wide on the right found Kasajima unmarked in the box, and she made no mistake with the volley from close range.

"The players worked hard to get a result, but let it slip in the last few minutes. "There is plenty of room for improvement, but we are heading in the right direction," Santrac said.

In the later match, Canada defeated host France 2-0 to claim first position on the points ladder. Australia must beat France and rely on Canada to drop points against Japan if it is to claim first place.

AAP

FRANCIS AWARITEFE writes Football

Scolari versus Romario and the Brazilian public

This week Francis looks at Pragmatism versus Principles in the team environment.

BRAZILIAN national coach Felipe Scolari is engaged in a battle of wills with the public over the selection of superstar Romario for the World Cup. The Vasco Da Gama striker is desperate to be included in the Brazilian squad for next month's tournament but so far has only featured once in the Brazilian team since Scolari took charge. Time is running out for Romario.

Romario in his brilliant but controversial career has cultivated a reputation for being difficult, selfish and not being a team player. Up until now his brilliance has been such that you could say he has got away with things that would not have been tolerated from lesser players. Reports are emerging that senior players held a meeting with Scolari imploring him not to recall Romario to the national team. Scolari has recently aimed pot shots squarely at Romario, saying that the atmosphere in team camps was much more harmonious "without stars".

Therein lies the dilemma. Does the coach pick Romario, who despite his perceived character flaws is still banging in the goals and in so doing compromise team unity?

On the other hand Romario could make the difference in winning the World Cup if selected.

In my experience as a footballer, I cannot stress highly enough the role team morale can play in the ultimate success of a team.

South Melbourne, in the Australian National Soccer League, is a shinning example of what can be achieved by a talented but cohesive and tight unit. The players are very close and do not tolerate prima donnas and selfish players. It did not matter how talented a player you were, if your character was such that you put yourself before the team, then you did not last long at the club.

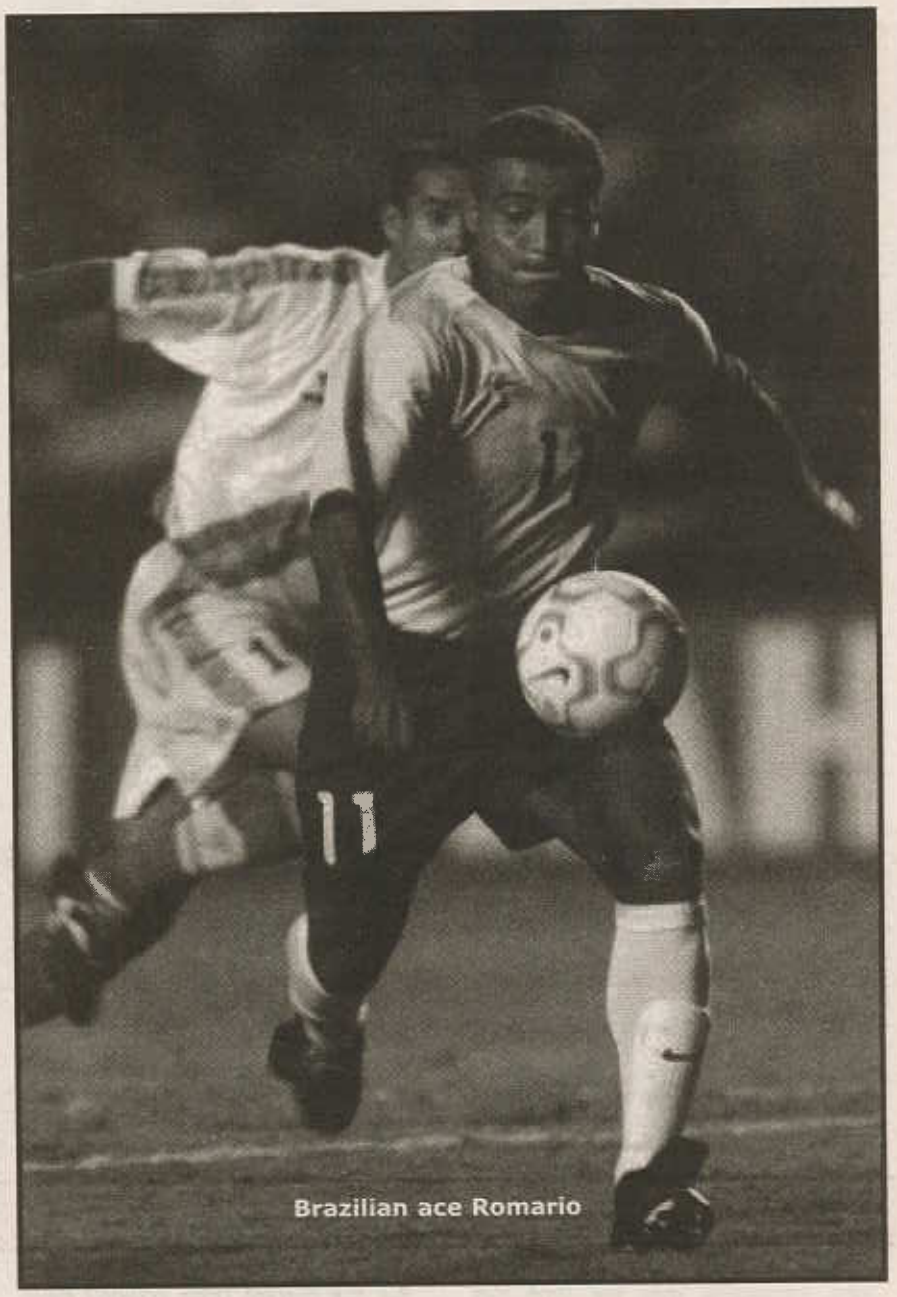
I remember being in some tough positions with the South Melbourne team as a player during games and how we dug deep and fought for each other to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds. When things were not going so well, it brought the best out in the players. I believe that team spirit and the team bond was the key and still is the reason the club keeps on being successful.

In my years at Marconi, I believe this was the missing ingredient because we certainly had the talent to have won a few championships. However we had players who were not prepared to make sacrifices for the team and this ultimately cost us.

This culture has been nurtured by the likes of Paul Trimboli, Ange Postecoglou, Mike Petersen and carried along by the likes of Steve Panopoulous, David Clarkson, Mehmet Durakovic and Vaughn Coveny. South Melbourne has always adopted a principled approach and that is why they have endured long lasting success even in the face of the adversity they faced earlier in the season, when they suffered long term injuries to Trimboli, Coveny and Clarkson.

I'm sure that Scolari knows that Romario would be very handy in Brazils armoury as they bid to win the World Cup for the fifth time. However Scolari is a principled man who can see that despite Romario's genius, the team as a whole is more important than the individual. He has to be applauded for taking this courageous and principled stand in the face of public opinion to the contrary.

One player cannot be allowed to jeopardize team morale and team unity going into a tournament as important as the World Cup.



Brazilian ace Romario

Romario's past I'm afraid has caught up with him.

Uncertainty surrounding Adelaide City

By Adam LETO

Whilst the Adelaide City Force a fortnight ago won their first match in 10 outings against fellow strugglers the Kingz, the result did nothing to appease supporters concerned about the future of the club.

One of the founding National Soccer League clubs and with the second highest number of NSL titles, City has hit hard-times of late.

They are of course not the only club facing hardship, but over the years no matter which clubs were struggling you could always rely on City bringing in the crowds.

This season the passionate supporters of Adelaide have voted with their feet, and after a season rocked by injury and poor results attendances are at an all-time low.

What has disappointed the local faithful has been the way the club has been run, rather than the team's on-field performances.

One angered fan posted this message on Soccer News website, "Adelaide City are a disgrace, they have treated their loyal people not only with disregard but with contempt."

"They lie about their attendances, I reckon they go out and count the cars and estimate their attendance from there.

"There was a Wiggles concert on at the Entertainment Centre hence the 2,500 crowd estimate. I know where I'd rather be! And I hate the Wiggles."

The emotion surrounding the sudden resignation of Adelaide City's favourite son and the most successful NSL coach of all time, Zoran Matic, has poured fuel onto an already burning fire.

Matic was diplomatic in his departure, conceding that the time has come for change.

"It's been on the cards for a long time, I don't think we were getting the support the club deserves, everything that goes up goes down, and every club has its ups and downs," he said.

"It was a beautiful ride but all good things have to come to an end. There's no sadness.

"I got as much as I could out of the players. It's the turn of somebody else now."

Chairman and now acting coach Bob D'Ottavi, has done a reasonable job during his short tenure, unluckily going down to Marconi in injury time, holding Perth to a draw and then defeating the Kingz.

His transition from an administrative role to an active hands-on one has been met with some sceptism within the organisation though.

Matic's assistant and the player with the second highest amount of NSL games played, all 445 of them with the Adelaide club, Serge Melta resigned angry with his treatment and more than concerned about its future.

"I have given so much to the Club and have enjoyed my career there. But after serving my apprenticeship as assistant to Zoran, I believe I should have been given the chance to take charge - particularly with only a handful of games left," he said

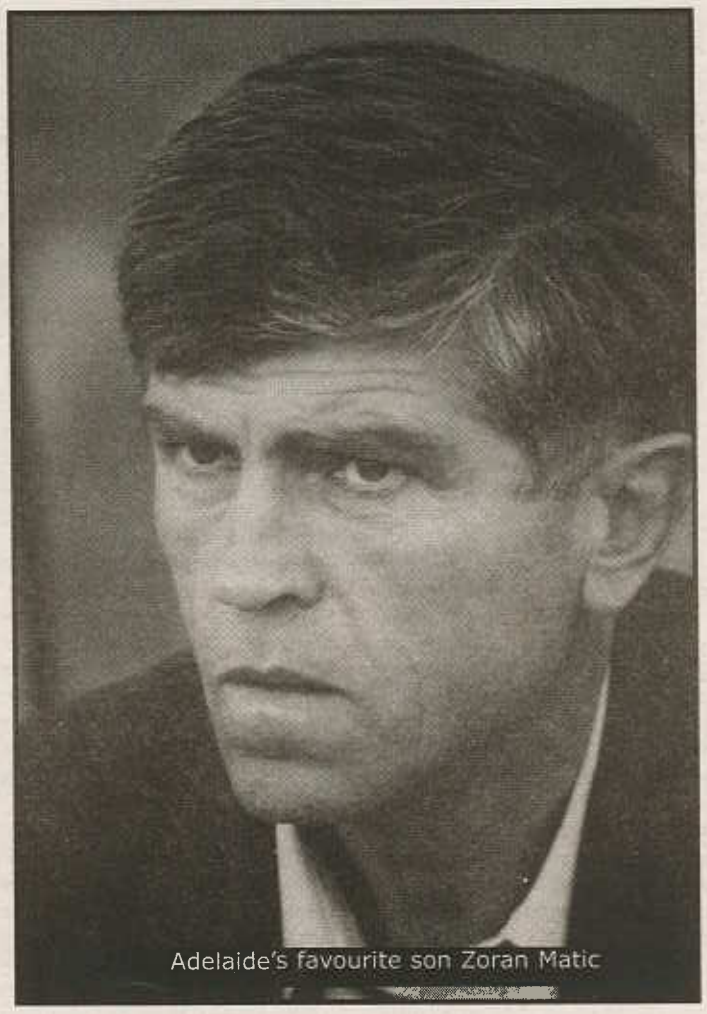
"But I do not know how a club like Adelaide City, that once was a part of so many people's lives here in Adelaide, has been allowed to fall into the situation where one man can have so much control and responsibility.

"I urge people to speak up, come out and save the club."

City have a number of exciting prospects on their books including former Joeys Iain Fyfe and Lucas Pantelis.

Players such as Scott Tunbridge, Nick Budin and Kristian Rees also look to have a big future in the game.

But the current crisis couldn't have come at a worse time, as there is talk of yet another League culling and with clubs such as the Kingz and Sydney United in the midst of financial trouble, City don't want to be in the same vicinity if or when the axe falls.



Adelaide's favourite son Zoran Matic

A recent web poll suggests what fans think the make-up of the Adelaide club should be for the next season.

Adelaide City Force - 14%

Adelaide Galaxy - 16%

Adelaide United - a privately owned composite team like the Adelaide Crows - 30%

Adelaide Fire - a composite SA team run by the SASF like the Adelaide Crows - 29%

No Adelaide team in the NSL - 9%

MR X

I LAST WEEK RAN a snippet about a former successful Australia coach who makes league star-cum-boxer Anthony "The Man" Mundine look humble.

And guess what? We've had so many letters, emails and phone calls about the gentleman concerned that it's remarkable.

After hearing several other interesting stories about the Super Ego, this old hack cannot believe that anyone would employ him in a position of serious influence.

But unfortunately, he will be something of a football mover and shaker in the foreseeable future.

But how long he lasts is anyones guess.

Here's another snippet from one of our callers: the Super Ego hates with a passion a former Socceroo mentor who once worked as a journalist.

Why? Because after telling all and sundry that he was a superb player in his former homeland, the Super Ego was exposed by the former journo as a fraud.

"Bullshit," the former journo said, "you NEVER played at that level because I covered that league for many years."

Apparently the Super Ego has never lived down the humiliation and he would love to see the earth swallow up his adversary.

****

WE HAD A CALL from the first grade coach at Western Rage regarding last week's Marshall Soper snippet and have been told that the former NSL star is upset with my inference that he has been causing some mayhem at training.

To refresh your memory, I mentioned that Marshall hadn't changed his hard-nosed training attitude and was still going in boots and all at 50-50 ball time.

I also mentioned that the former star was prone to give the youngsters a verbal spray when things weren't to his liking.

However, coach Rick Budini informed Soccer Today that nothing could be further from the truth and that Marshall was concerned with the allegations.

Sorry Rick and Marshall, but my source is very much inside your camp and assures me that he has witnessed the allegations first-hand.

****

AN AMAZING thing happened at last week's NSW Premier League match between Sutherland and Blacktown at Seymour Shaw Park.

With the stereo playing the National Anthem not working, the crowd took it upon themselves to sing without any music at all.

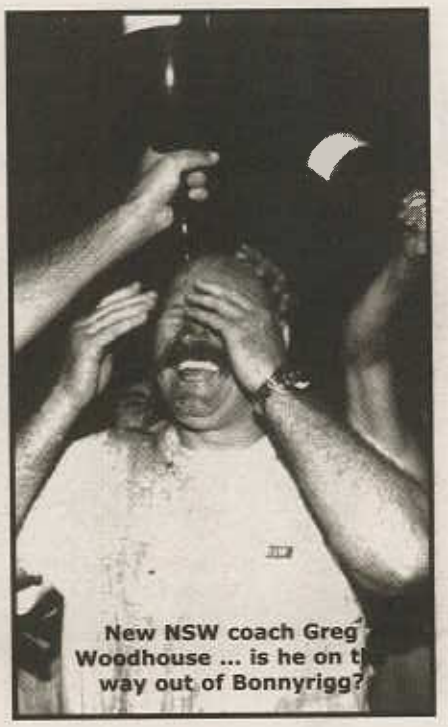
It was quite a moving moment to hear a few hundred people really get behind the Anthem and certainly sent some shivers up most people's spines and even drew a response from the players who actually applauded the crowd once they had finished.

****

IT SEEMS that second is just not good enough out Bonnyrigg way, with coach Greg Woodhouse strongly believed to be shown the door next season.

There is a strong rumour that Woodie even had to bargain with the board to even allow him to continue on through the finals. At least he will have the State team to look after for a few matches.

Former NSL star Marshall Soper ... unhappy with last week's Mr X column



New NSW coach Greg Woodhouse ... is he on t way out of Bonnyrigg?

****

ON THE state team and there has been chaos in what was supposed to be the showpiece events for this season when the NSW side clash with their Queensland and Victorian rivals at the end of the month.

The only problem is that the scheduled match between QLD and NSW just happens to fall in the middle of the finals series.

Premier League coaches have already refused to release their players, hence the hesitancy in the NSW squad being officially announced.

At best NSW will more than likely have a second string squad available with the stronger teams no doubt concentrating on taking out the title.

Yet another mess that the Federation has gotten themselves into, and tried to sweep under the carpet hoping nobody would realise.

****

THERE WERE a few murmurs in the Bulls camp last week with their approach to their final match against Penrith.

Needing to win by a healthy margin to get past Belconnen who were expected to cruise to victory against St.George, a few players were keen to come out all guns blazing in the hope of racking up a big score to get them through to the last spot in the finals on goal difference.

This didn't eventuate and the Bulls were left wondering on what could've been.

Still on the Bulls and coach Craig Sharpley's tenure at the club is set for review this week.

The Bulls have spent big this season, and with only four players still on contract for next season look for a few heads to roll.

****

LOOK for the coaching merry-go-round to be in full swing within the next couple of months as both Premier League and NSL clubs are expected to have a few vacancies.

In the Premier League you can pretty much choose from any number of clubs including Parramatta, Bonnyrigg, Fairfield, Canterbury-Marrickville, Blacktown, the list goes on.

In the NSL clubs such as Marconi, Northern Spirit, Olympic and Adelaide are all set to bring in some fresh blood.

John Colleja who has done an outstanding job as assistant to Tam Finlayson at Parramatta this season and was highly regarded as being his replacement for next season.

This has been shelved for the moment though, with talk that he has had a falling out with the club President and the pair are no longer on speaking terms.

****

HAVING cleared their financial debt with the NSW Soccer Federation, Sutherland look set to continue in the Premier League next season.

On top of that look set for some big-name signings in the next couple of weeks, as newly appointed coach John Turner looks to bulk up his side for next season.

With all but of couple of players remaining from this season's side, Turner is looking for loyal players rather then those after a fast buck.

****

FINALLY the Premier League playoffs are here, but don't expect clubs to reap the financial rewards for their success by reaching the post-season.

All gate receipts go to the Federation, who in turn expect the ground to be fully conducive to a fun, safe and enjoyable day, that also includes providing security at the club's own expense.

You'd think that after all the efforts that the clubs have put into to reach this stage, and to stage an event, that they'd at least be guaranteed a portion of the gate takings. Guess not.

One thing that the Federation has done right is given teams home advantage in the finals, which after all these years is an overdue innovation.

****

Training tips with NICK BILBIJA

Discipline is a major factor in player performance

DISCIPLINE is a subject very dear to my heart.

I'm a strong believer that discipline is the foundation on which all your success as a player should be built on.

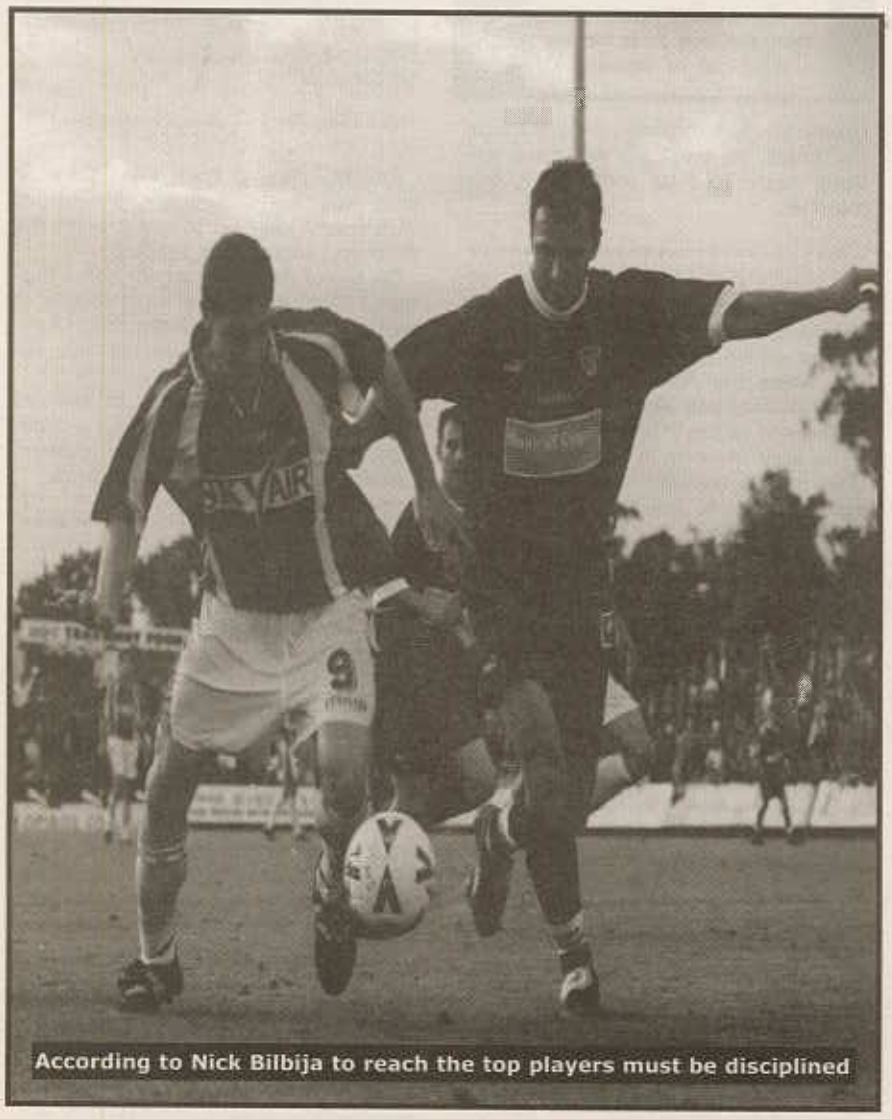
Every player has expectations and responsibilities to their teammates.

In a 90 minute game of soccer players will occasionally make mistakes, that's something that's inevitable.

A majority of mistakes occur due to a drop in concentration often caused by fatigue.

You simply can't disregard these mistakes as things "that happen", players need to work hard in their preparation to ensure they're not a regular occurence.

The team must come first and the side must not be made to pay for an individual's lack of self-discipline.



According to Nick Bilbija to reach the top players must be disciplined

A lot of this comes down to the attitude of a player, and their approach to the game.

Bad attitudes are like bad apples, they're simply not wanted. It is up to the individual to get their attitude right before they even step foot onto the field.

If you have not prepared yourself mentally before train or play then it's often too late to try and adjust your attitude.

The real professional arrives in the right frame of mind and ready to do their best.

The professional has disciplined themselves by setting goals for the game or training session, mentally rehearsed set plays, always see themselves as successful and naturally have a positive attitude.

Discipline is the backbone of any successful organisation be it a soccer team or million dollar business.

It's an ongoing feature that influences your lifestyle in many ways. It means looking after your body by eating right.

Discipline is fruit or cereal for breakfast, not bacon and eggs.

It is chicken and salad sandwiches for lunch, not hamburgers. It's grilled chicken or fish, or steak with vegetables for dinner, not Pizza or KFC.

It's drinking two litres of water per day, not two litres of coke.

One of the greatest coaches of all-time, legendary American Football coach Vince Lombardi had this to say about discipline.

"I've never known a man worth his salt who in the long run, deep down in his heart didn't appreciate the grind, the discipline.

"There is something good in men that really yearns for discipline."

Nick Bilbija is:

**Fitness coach at Bonnyrigg White Eagles*

**a three-time Grand Final-winning fitness coach*

**NSW representative conditioner*

**NSL and NSW Referees fitness coach*

Setting a career path

By Jimmy Fraser,
former Australia World Cup goalkeeper

ONE OF the biggest dilemmas faced by a young player is projecting ahead to where their career is headed and the best possible route to take to achieve their aims.

Talented players are identified at a very young age and placed into programs that will enhance not only their abilities but also aid them with their pathway to representative selection.

These talented identification programs select players on a variety of aspects including their physical, technical ability and their tactical awareness. The selector will collate their information and make their decisions on the player's current ability and what the selectors predict is their capacity to improve.

While the selection process can be quite intense at the top level, with information gathered by experienced selectors from observed play in matches, various tests and predicted future development. At the levels under the elite programs however the selection of players often relies on inexperienced coaches with no previous knowledge of the players ability and not testing criteria to support their selection.

Players who are late developers often slip through the identification process in the early stages of player development while some youngsters who develop physically at an early age may have an advantage.

Many of the early developers fall by the wayside, as their sheer physical size is not enough to carry them through as their peers catch up to and match them physically. Often these player's have not worked hard enough on other aspects of their game relying on their size and weight advantage to gain an advantage and their need to develop their skills has been neglected.

On the other hand many players who showed no early promise develop into excellent players and go on to reach the top level.

Young developing players need game time! Time on the park to gain the experience that will develop an understanding of the game and give them the experience to make decisions on the tactical side of the game where they are constantly repositioning to receive the ball and read the play and develop their skills.

While playing at the top level in their age or division should be the player's ultimate aim this may for a variety of reasons may not always be possible. The importance of game time to a developing player can not be stressed enough and I would rather see players play at a lower level every week than continuously warm the bench in a higher division.

Young players often stress about not playing in the top division and feel they are missing out by not playing at the top level. Often they are better off playing to the level of their ability and honing their all round game to improve their skills and then trial for the next level up utilizing the game awareness and experience they have gained on the park.

The disappointment of missing out on selection

destroys the career of many young players who don't know how to cope with not meeting their personal expectations.

There are many factors that may affect the performance of young players; growth spurts where players become uncoordinated and awkward, emotional development, pressure from schoolwork and family commitments can all have an influence on performance.

Some players for no apparent reason are just slow developers and do not show any obvious signs of their future potential in their early development.

Some guidance is required to give the player some guidance on their expectations of themselves and setting goals to reach the level of their ability. Most players if asked their future goals would aspire to play on the international scene either at a top overseas club or at national level.

Goal setting is an important part of setting a career path and while the long-term goal of representing your country or playing in the top competition in the country of your choice is an excellent long-term goal we must set realistic short and medium term goals if we are to set about reaching our long-term objectives.

Game time at the top level of your ability is a starting point to work from. Then the player must set about organizing a program that will develop their all round ability and enhance their selection prospects at the next level. This program should be ongoing and new goals set as the previously set goals are reached. Young players will require help from coaches and parents to set up a suitable program that will most benefit the player and the program should take into consideration the players age, present skills ability,

Their physical development and how receptive they are to training.

The program should aim to develop a work ethic where the player makes the most of the time in all areas of the program while concentrating on any obvious weaknesses.

More next week on developing a career path.

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White hot Milicic key to Sharks' success

By Derek ROYAL

OLYMPIC Sharks sharpshooter Ante Milicic is the key man in his side's quest for premiership glory, starting this Sunday against Melbourne Knights in Melbourne.

In a stunning display of clinical finishing, Milicic grabbed four goals in last weekend's 5-2 rout of a woeful Football Kingz, taking his goal tally to seven since joining the Sharks in February.

Formerly the favourite son and captain at Sydney United, Milicic moved across town to the Sharks in a deal believed to be worth more than $100 000, and he has had such a major impact on the boys in blue that he's seen as the missing piece in the team's premiership jigsaw.

Before Milicic arrived, the Sharks were perceived as a flashy team built around a solid defence and midfielders who could score the odd goal.

With Nicky Carle, Troy Halpin and Tommy Pondeljak providing the spark and impetus, few sides could compete with the Sharks in the middle of the park.

But their inability to make the most of the trio's creative juices proved to be a problem - until Milicic departed his beloved club for a new life in Cronulla.

Milicic filled a much-needed void and so far, the Sharks' Blue Chip investment has reaped the rewards.

The most remarkable factor in Milicic's seven-goal spree is that he only returned to action two weeks ago against Perth after over a month on the sidelines with a thigh injury.

On debut against Northern Spirit in Round 17, he delighted 6,000 rabid Toyota Park fans by scoring a goal and laying on another in a 3-0 demolition.

Milicic rewarded the Sharks' faith in him by scoring his team's first goal and producing the final pass for their second, by Pondeljak.

In the aftermath of victory, Milicic bathed in the glory of well wishers, most of whom had turned up to Shark Park hoping to witness exactly what had transpired.

"To tell you the truth it all happened very quickly but when a club like Olympic comes in for you and they've got their eye on a championship then it's a move that must be seriously considered," he told *Soccer Today*.

"I was quite happy to make the move cross town and after tonight's game I can see that we're on course for a successful season."

Too right.

Milicic added that he was encouraged by the energy, youth and enthusiasm of his new teammates.

"They're just so young and they're so fast and they just love to get forward," he said.

"And as a striker I'm enjoying every minute of that.

"I think I've slotted in fairly well and I think we can only go forward."

Before making the move, Milicic was warned that it would probably take him at least a couple of weeks to fit in with his new teammates, but so far, there have been no hiccoughs.

"I know a few of the guys at the club," Milicic said.

"I know Ante Juric. I know "Pondy" (Tommy Pondeljak), Clint Bolton and I played against (coach) Gary Phillips in the 1997 Grand Final, so I'm familiar with the guys.

"I'm very happy and as a striker it's my job to score goals and to set them up.

"But the main thing for the side is that we continue winning."

Indeed, unlike most of his teammates, Milicic boasts a wealth of Finals and big match experience from his days at United and a recent four-year spell in Europe.

Milicic this season returned to United from a European stint that included stops at Dutch club NAC Breda and Croatia's Rijeka.

His return offered United renewed hope and inspiration but it also provided the NSL with a genuine superstar.

Milicic certainly kept his side of the bargain at Edensor Park, scoring eight goals and creating opportunities for those around him, but the club desperately needed to ease their financial woes and immediately sold their favourite son when the Sharks' offer came through.

He also watched United's season resemble a runaway roller coaster: penetrating the heights of the stratosphere one week and caressing the earth at a high velocity of knots the next.

But now, Milicic is focused on helping the Sharks overcome the Knights in Sunday's elimination final first leg.

The Knights have been something of a dark horse this season, going about their business quietly and efficiently.

Their Sydney visitors would best be advised not to take their hosts too lightly, especially at the cauldron known as Knights Stadium.

Milicic may have shortened the Sharks' odds of winning the National League but being a true professional, he's sure to just take each game as it comes.

And without a doubt he won't be too far away from grabbing his eighth goal for his beloved Sharks.

Knights' Dynamic Duo Da Costa and Porter lead finals challenge

By Melina BOURSINOS

Brothers in arms - Da Costa (left) and Porter (right) celebrate yet another goal

THEY are the dynamic duo of the NSL. Together they have brought success back to the Melbourne Knights and made a name for themselves as two of Australia's most talented strikers.

Joel Porter and Toto Da Costa have come from different corners of the world, but they are united in their cause to win a championship for the club that gave them the opportunity to play the game they love.

"I first played for the Croydon Kings which is in the state league in Adelaide from 9 years old right through till I was 18," Porter told Soccer Today.

"I then spent one year at West Adelaide under Manfred Schaefer and then Adrian Santrac, until it went into liquidation.

"I wanted to continue playing, so I went back to Croydon."

Angolan front man Da Costa has another story to tell.

He travelled Down Under thinking that playing soccer would be a piece of cake, but he soon received a rude awakening.

"I came from Holland because a friend who lives here told me it was a good country.

"I also played in Portugal for Sporting Lisbon and I enjoyed the football there because it was technical.

"I thought playing football here would be easier, but I was surprised because it is tough.

"It's very physical."

The Melbourne Knights have a strong history and their supporters are known as some of the most passionate in the league.

In the past opposing teams would fear making the trip to Somers Street, but since their back to back title wins in 1994-95, 1995-96, the Sunshine-based club have struggled to reclaim the glory.

"You hear stories about the club and supporters, but I've had no problems," Porter said. "They have given me a chance to play NSL soccer and I am grateful for that."

Toto is equally fond of his new found home.

"I am very, very happy here," he says.

"Everyone is good to me.

"They are good players. Joel is my best friend. He is a very good boy. We stuck together when we came."

"I thought playing football here would be easier, but I was surprised" - Toto Da Costa

This season the pair have both played exceptional soccer leading the team's charge to the top half of the table.

According to Toto it is the understanding between them that has assisted them in being top goal scorers for the Knights.

"I've scored 11 goals so far," Da Costa says.

"The same as Joel. We do everything the same, he laughs.

"I think I have played good."

Porter on the other hand was injured in the pre-season and although he admits it wasn't easy, he was determined to overcome the obstacles and returned to the starting line up with all guns firing.

"It was hard for me at the start because I wasn't able to train with the team and I was up and down, but everything has gone well since then, he says"

Andrew Marth is known as one of the toughest players in the NSL.

He is uncompromising in a tackle and he can deliver the goods when required.

It is clear when watching the Knights play they have adopted his "never say die" attitude. I asked the boys if they agreed with my theory and they responded by confirming that his guidance and experience has assisted and motivated the team to do well.

"I guess he had a shaky start to the season, but since, we've improved," Porter says.

"We have good training sessions and he has helped us."

Toto believes that "Stabber" - as Marth is nicknamed - is an excellent coach and is one of the main reasons he has fitted in at the club without many difficulties.

"He is a very good man. We talk and he understands me. He has been good to me. He isn't like the coaches in Europe that you can't approach, he is like a friend."

It is no secret that more and more clubs are struggling to stay afloat in the National Soccer League.

Poor crowds, high wages, increasing costs, and the inability to attract corporate sponsorship are just some of the many issues that are being experienced in Australian soccer today.

The Melbourne Knights are no strangers to these problems, but despite their small budget and close-knit fan base, they have managed to mix it with some of the biggest teams in the league.

"The main reason we have come so far is that we have a balance of attackers and defenders, who work together," Porter says.

"We have some great players: Toto, Ivo De Jesus and Kres Marusic and our goalkeeper Marty John. "I think every single player has played a part."

As they head towards their toughest challenge yet, the team-mates are quietly confident that they can achieve their ultimate goal and return the NSL trophy to the club that has produced some of this country's greatest ever players.

"I think we have a really good chance of winning the title," Porter says.

"At the moment we are ten per cent away from playing our best soccer and we will step up for the finals.

The 23-year-old South Australian then pauses ...

"There is no team I really fear, but I guess South Melbourne will be our toughest opponent, because of the home town rivalry, but none of us are really worried."

For a split second I think back and remember, the chants, the emotion and the atmosphere at the Knights' games.

To me, this is exactly what is missing from Australian soccer.

Bring on Olympic Sharks and the intensity of the Finals.

Relaxed Trajanovski says Strikers have nothing to lose

By Adam LETO

AUSTRALIA international Kris Trajanovski could well be the key to the Brisbane Strikers' premiership hopes.

After all, the sharpshooter boasts Finals experience and the right mental attitude to cope with the additional pressures associated with the business end of the season.

The Strikers have come from left field to contest this season's Final Series, and with seemingly less pressure than their opposition head into this week's encounter in a relaxed state of mind.

"No one even expected us to be in the competition this year," Trajanovski told Soccer Today.

"We were kicked out of the competition, then re-instated and have been in the Top-Six from day one of the league when everyone tipped us to finish last.

"There are certainly no expectations. When you look at teams like Perth, Olympic, Newcastle and South, with the money they have spent their expected to reach and win the Grand Final.

"There is no pressure on us, we're a lot more relaxed and will go into the games without that sort of pressure."

In his first season at the Strikers after coming off a disrupted season at Marconi, the Melbourne striker's form has been much like that of his team.

His combination with Paul Foster and crowd-pleaser Fernando Rech have given the Strikers greater penetration up front, but for all their efforts the Strikers are regarded by many as being more of a grinding rather than flashy team.

Their goal-scoring record this year doesn't reflect that theory, with the Brisbane side having the third best attack in the league behind Perth and the Melbourne Knights.

Trajanovski concedes that all regular season form can be tossed aside, as Finals matches have a habit of producing the unexpected.

"Finals are about grinding out results, it's a totally different style of match," he says

"I've got experience from previous finals campaigns and you have to have the right mental attitude of not fearing any side going into these games.

"If we can get our confidence up early on, score an early goal, then with a bit of luck we should be able to get a result."

Trajanovski's own form of late has been pleasing for the Strikers, and with the absence of Foster, he has relished the extra responsibility.

His two goals against his former side the Stallions a couple of weeks ago, an obvious highlight, but not enough to get his side over the line.

"It was great scoring twice against my old club," he comments.

"I've still got some good friends there and when I was at the club they were very god to me.

"Still losing the game was disappointing, despite scoring the goals.

"You're there to win games, it doesn't matter who scores the goals."

The Strikers are rather fortunate to have Trajanovski in their side, considering his situation at the end of the last NSL season.

With the Stallions unable to hang on to the skilful forward, he decided to try his luck in England with Sheffield United, where his good friend and fellow Aussie Frank Talia kept goals for the English first division side.

"It was a good experience, but I just picked the wrong club to go to," Trajanovski admits.

"They had about 8 strikers over there trialling for a spot, and included International players from Cameroon and Canada.

"It was just too bad I wasn't a defender because that's what they needed.

"There were about 7800 free agents at the time, so if you're not exactly what they're looking for they'll just bring someone else in."

With his overseas experiment over, Trajanovski decided to return to Australia and once again focus his efforts on success in the NSL.

With the Strikers losing high-calibre players such as Jade North, Jeromy Harris and Wayne Srhoj to Olympic, they were in desperate need fo some potency up front, an Trajanovski more than fit the bill.

"When I first got here it was a goo change, and had time to relax, bu then it just got too hot," he laughs.

"Training in minimum 30 degre weather is hard, but on the other han it was very good for my fitness."

After spells in midfield with th Stallions previously it was a welcom move back up front for the talente goal-poacher.

"Knowing that I'm playing up fron every week has really benefited m game," he confirms.

"I've played some good football th season, but don't think I've scored a many goals as I should've.

"I went through a bit of rough patc mid-season, but the last five or s games I've returned to my early sea son form and I've been happy with th way things are going."

South riding high in belated Premiership charge - Coveny

by Melina BOURSINOS

Soccer's journey is in all ways true to the word.

It involves success, failure, pressure and prestige.

South Melbourne striker Vaughan Coveny travelled to Australia as a 19 year old on a mission, determined to succeed in his own "journey" and carve a reputation for himself in Australian Soccer. The New Zealand international has assisted his team in achieving one of the most amazing comebacks ever seen in Australian soccer.

The "Blues" were at the bottom of the table before turning their campaign around by embarking on a 10 match unbeaten run, which has guaranteed them a spot in the NSL finals.

"There is a good feeling in the team. "Everyone is riding high. There were no expectations. There are a lot of teams looking over their shoulders. If we continue to play like we've played in the last 10 weeks then we'll surprise a lot of people. I think we've got a good chance of doing well," explains the Kiwi.

After South's comprehensive 3-1 victory against Marconi and Vaughan's 4th goal in two games, I asked him which opponents he sees as the team's biggest threat in the finals. He is quick to answer.

"Perth and Newcastle will be the two toughest teams. I guess that's because they finished 1st and 2nd and they're geared to do well because they get an extra chance. With the rest of the teams, it's open slather really."

His career could have gone a number of different directions, as he was involved in various sports as a child. However it seems that the 29-year-old was destined to become a professional soccer player and hasn't looked back since he first kicked a soccer ball on our shores.

"I played competitive tennis and soccer when I was young. I played soccer for a team in the New Zealand league and I thought I'd come here and give it a go. I knew it was a more professional league with a higher standard," states the forward.

When it became known that there was a fast paced Kiwi with an incredible eye for goals,

South Melbourne's coach at the time Frank Arok was eager to sign him up. This was a welcome move for Coveny who had first played for the Melbourne Knights, then Wollongong, and was searching for a stable club. Looking back, he claims that as soon as he signed with South Melbourne, he knew it was the right decision.

"I hope to be around for a long time. I will keep my options open, but I have a soft spot for South Melbourne, I've had some great times here."

"At the time, South Melbourne was the biggest club in the league and I was lucky enough to be asked by Frank Arok to come down and play."

Since his arrival at the Lakers, he has gone from strength to strength and cemented his spot in the first team. He was also able to fulfil every sportsperson's dream when he was asked to represent his country at the highest level. Even so, he says that he has reached many of his goals at the Melbourne based club.

"My fondest memories are winning 2 championships at South Melbourne and competing in the World Club Championships in Brazil in 2000."

The likeable striker, who has become one of the favourites amongst South supporters, believes that the appointment of Eddie Krncevic is a positive step, as he brings a wealth of experience to the club.

"I guess I haven't played many games under him, due to my injury, but he is a man who has played overseas and has invaluable knowledge which can only help us learn and develop as players.

"He is different to any of the other coaches we've had," he comments.

Watching from the terraces whilst he was injured wasn't easy for this friendly individual, as he was unable to help his team-mates through the transitional period.

"It's been difficult, with all the injuries and the number of youth players starting in the first team, but I always believed that the results would come. "

With a mass exodus from South Melbourne to Auckland Kingz at the end of last season, supporters were left wondering why Vaughan didn't follow former coach Mike Petersen and ex-players Andrew Vlahos, Con Boutsianis and Vas Kalogeracos back to his country of origin.

"At the time I was still under contract. It's hard to say what I would have done if I was approached, but as with every offer I probably would have considered it, because it is home," he admits.

Despite his honesty, he explains that he is happy at South Melbourne and has many good friends at the club where he has spent most of his career.

"I hope to be around for a long time. I will keep my options open, but I have a soft spot for South Melbourne, I've had some great times here."

NATIONAL LEAGUE FINALS 2002

ELIMINATION FINAL FIRST LEG
South Melbourne v Olympic Sharks
Bob Jane Stadium
Sunday 14 April
3.00 pm

ELIMINATION FINAL FIRST LEG
Melbourne Knights v Brisbane Strikers
Knights Stadium
Sunday 14 April
6.00 pm

MAJOR SEMI-FINAL FIRST LEG
Perth Glory v Newcastle United
Subiaco Oval
Saturday 20 April
7.00 pm

The Grass Roots Game sponsored by
PAT FRASER REAL EST
Westmead 9689 1344 Toongabbie

Dulwich Hill you inconsistent but sensational

By Adam LETO

Leading the way for Dulwich Hill in their quest for Division One Youth League success has been their under 17s side who have been in sensational form this season.

The 17s are currently on top of their ladder with five wins and a draw from their six matches.

A relatively young side, Dulwich Hill 17s are the pick of their youth league squads who have so far had an inconsistent start.

Both the 13s and 14s are fairly new squads, so time is obviously going to be the key factor in getting results this season.

The 13s have only won one game this season, and are in second last place, whilst the 14s have shown more promise having only lost the one game this season.

They are still however to play a number of teams on top of them on the ladder so the next few weeks should give a fairer indication of what to expect from them this season.

"Things will improve when the teams get to know each other a bit better, so in time we'll get there." - John Ferreira

"The players are the only players from last year's side to have stayed at the club, and of course when the players know each other it makes it a lot easier," explains Senior club secretary John Ferreira.

"That's been the secret to our success, and if the other boys had stayed in the other age groups then we'd be doing a lot better in those sides as well.

"At the moment though all the boys are doing their job though, as we're

"Once the committee from last disintegrated with them went a lot of our players," Ferreira admits.

"So obviously it hasn't been easy rebuilding from scratch.

"The 13s are struggling a little bit, whilst the 14s are doing as well as can be expected considering the circumstances.

"Things will improve when the teams get to know each other a bit better, so in time we'll get there."

something that so far they have done a good job of. "A lot of the 17s boys have been promoted to the 19s," Ferreira says. "We even have a 15 year-old playing for them, so we defi-

NSW DIVISION O RESULTS

UND
Scnofield Scorpions 8
Granville Assn 3
Hawkesbury City SC 0
HC Crescent Star 3
Camden Tigers 2
Stanmore 2
Dulwich Hill 0

UND
Schofields Scorpions 0
Granville Assn 0
Hawkesbury City SC 0
HC Crescent Star 1
Camden Tigers 0
Stanmore 3
Dulwich Hill 1

UND
Schofields Scorpions 0
Granville Assn 4
Hawkesbury City SC 2
HC Crescent Star 0
Camden Tigers 4
Stanmore 1
Dulwich Hill 2

UND
Schofields Scorpions 1
Granville Assn 2
Hawkesbury City SC 0
HC Crescent Star 2

Olympic Sharks dominate at Marconi Stadium

By Adam LETO

MARCONI and Olympic Sharks went head-to-head in Premier Youth League action last weekend in a contest that not only featured some exciting young talent, but also proved why these two clubs are rated so highly in youth circles.

The 13s was a tough battle with both sides unwilling to take a backwards step. The Stallions were sitting two points clear of the Sharks going into the match, where the two sides needed the points to keep in contact with the Top Five.

The Sharks prevailed 1-0, and while it wasn't pretty, they're no doubt happy with the three points which puts them in fifth spot, one point ahead of the Stallions who are tied with Central Coast, Blacktown and St. George.

Heading into the 14s clash both sides were undefeated, and after a thrilling 2-2 draw both teams still are.

The Stallions did remarkably well to come from behind in a gripping contest with a goal in the last ten minutes of play, and despite their push forward in the dying stages couldn't come up with the decisive goal.

Both sides were guilty of missing opportunities in front of goals, with Marconi missing a penalty that was brilliantly saved by Olympic's number one.

Only minutes later Olympic had a free-kick that was brilliantly curled around the wall, only to see it hit the post and bounce back into play.

Probably a fair result, in what was an often-fiery match, with the stretcher called onto the field on quite a number of occasions.

The result sees the Stallions stay in fourth spot but still trailing league leaders the Northern Spirit by five points. The Stallions have shown they can match it with the big-guns, drawing with the Spirit two weeks ago.

For Olympic, they currently sit one point outside the Top Five with the Leichhardt Tigers, who they meet next week in what should be a great match-up in all age groups.

In the match of the day, the 15s contest promised plenty with both Sharks and the Stallions representing their respective clubs best-performed sides.

The Sharks went into the match as slight favourites, sitting on top of the ladder, with Marconi three points behind but with a game in hand.

Two early minute goals from both sides cancelled each other out, and in what was a tough grafting match, neither side could conjure up a second goal, with the scores remaining locked at 1-1.

It doesn't get any easier for the Stallions who this week face second placed Parramatta Eagles, in what looks to be another gripping contest, whilst the Sharks face Leichhardt in a match where they'd be expected to get the three points.

In the final match of the day the Stallions were always going to do it tough against the Sharks who have won three of their five games.

The Marconi side on the other hand were yet to pick up a point and despite being more than competitive in their matches, are still to find their feet.

Up until half-time the Stallions were making a game of it, but eventually the Sharks proved to be too strong and ran out 5-2 winners.

The Sharks are now in third spot on the ladder, whilst Marconi will be looking for a turn-around to their season when they take on the Parramatta Eagles who are sitting mid-table.

Assistant coach of Marconi Colts side Dean Severin, explains the uniqueness of Marconi and Olympic clashes over the years.

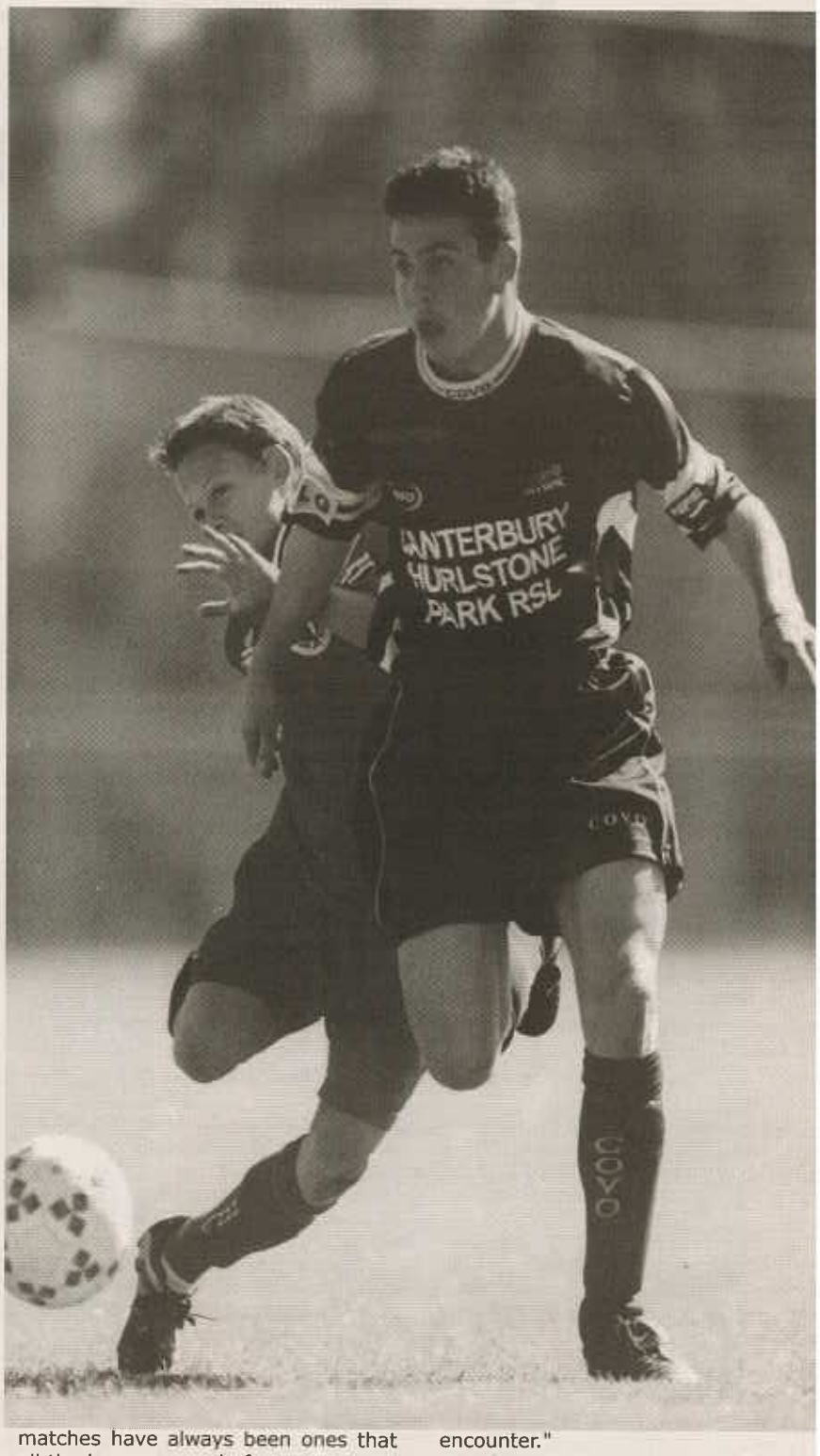
"The matches are always tough, grafting types of matches," he says.

"Ever since I can remember the matches have always been ones that all the boys are ready for.

"Olympic tend to lift when they play against us and they showed their class today.

"Our boys did well, and more than matched them, in what was a tough encounter."

At the end of the day, both Olympic and Marconi displayed the type of performances we've come to expect, and they're sure to feature prominently in the latter stages of the competition.



PREMIER YOUTH LEAGUE RESULTS ROUND 6

UNDER 13

Wollongong 1	Sutherland 1
Sydney United 0	Blacktown C 1
Marconi 0	Olympic 1
St George 4	Penrith 2
Manly-Warr 0	Parramatta 2
Leichhardt 1	Northern Spirit 2

UNDER 14

Wollongong 0	Sutherland 1
Sydney United 2	Blacktown C 2
Marconi 2	Olympic 2
St George 1	Penrith 3
Manly-Warr 0	Parramatta 0
Leichhardt 0	Northern Spirit 5

UNDER 15

Wollongong 1	Sutherland 2
Sydney United 3	Blacktown 0
Marconi 1	Olympic 1
St George 2	Penrith 4
Manly-Warr 3	Parramatta 4
Leichhardt 1	Northern Spirit 7

UNDER 17

Wollongong 2	Sutherland 0
Sydney United 1	Blacktown 2
Marconi 2	Olympic 5
St George 1	Penrith 1
Manly-Warr 2	Parramatta 1
Leichhardt 1	Northern Spirit 4

Nepean 13s Association's shining lights

By Adam LETO

Nepean Association have made an impressive start to their Super Youth League campaign, with positive results in all four age groups.

Leading the way are the youngest boys, the 13s who have shown enough to suggest that they will be thereabouts when the trophies are handed out.

At the time of print the Nepean 13s were one point behind leaders Newcastle United with a game in hand.

The 13s have been relentless in their approach this season, and have attacked with merciless glee, racking up scores of 8-0 and 5-0, on their way to 23 goals with only the solitary goal against.

Solid all over the park, the Nepean 13s main competition looks likely to come from Newcastle who they drew 1-1 with in round five.

"Our 13s are our shining lights at the moment, they're going great," explains Nepean's representative secretary John Todd.

"They're well coached by Peter Baglis and are a combination of last year's 12s as well as some additions from Mt.Druitt, Blacktown Association and the Panthers.

"Players that have been going well include Jay Dyball, Luke Harris, Simon Shin and Craig Morley.

"However it's hard to single out too many players because the team as a whole have done so well, and all the boys are great young players."

The 14s have also made a solid start to the season and currently sit just three points out of third place with a game in hand.

Solid wins against Blacktown Association and Hills United, reinforce the promise that the 14s have, but need to work on consistency if they're to match it with the top teams.

"The side have about five players left over from last season, as well as a good mixture of new additions that have come together well," Todd says.

"Coach Doug Rennie has been fortunate enough to obtain the services of some good players from other Super Youth League clubs.

"And whilst they haven't hit their straps yet, they're improving every week.

"It looks to be a close competition but the test will come when we play the teams that are higher up on the ladder."

Nepean's 15s have made a slow start to the season with only one win out of their first five matches.

After an impressive win against Hills United, the 15s lost two in a row. Firstly to the Bankstown City Lions, where they were outplayed and then to Canterbury Marrickville 2-1.

Nepean looks to have turned the corner in recent weeks with a good showing against second placed Newcastle United in entertaining 3-3 draw, followed by another draw this time against Blacktown Association.

"The 15s league is a very competitive and close competition," explains Todd.

"After a slow start, the side is starting to perform to our expectations, and with an ounce of luck we could've been in the Top Four.

"But we expect the team to improve as the season progresses and hopefully reach the finals."

The 17s are another side yet to maximise their potential, but after a tough draw first up, are looking to build their confidence with a few wins in the upcoming weeks.

"The teams they have played against have been very strong, and its been reflected on the scoreboard with only one win and four losses," Todd comments.

"These sides have been the form sides in the competition, but the boys have been very competitive.

SUPER YOUTH LEAGUE RESULTS ROUND 6

UNDER 13

Canterbury 1	Hajduk 1
Fairfield 4	Macarthur 2
Ku-Ring-Gai 0	AC United 0
Bonnyrigg 1	Hills Utd 0
Eastern Subs 0	Mingara 1
Bankstown 0	Newcastle 1

UNDER 14

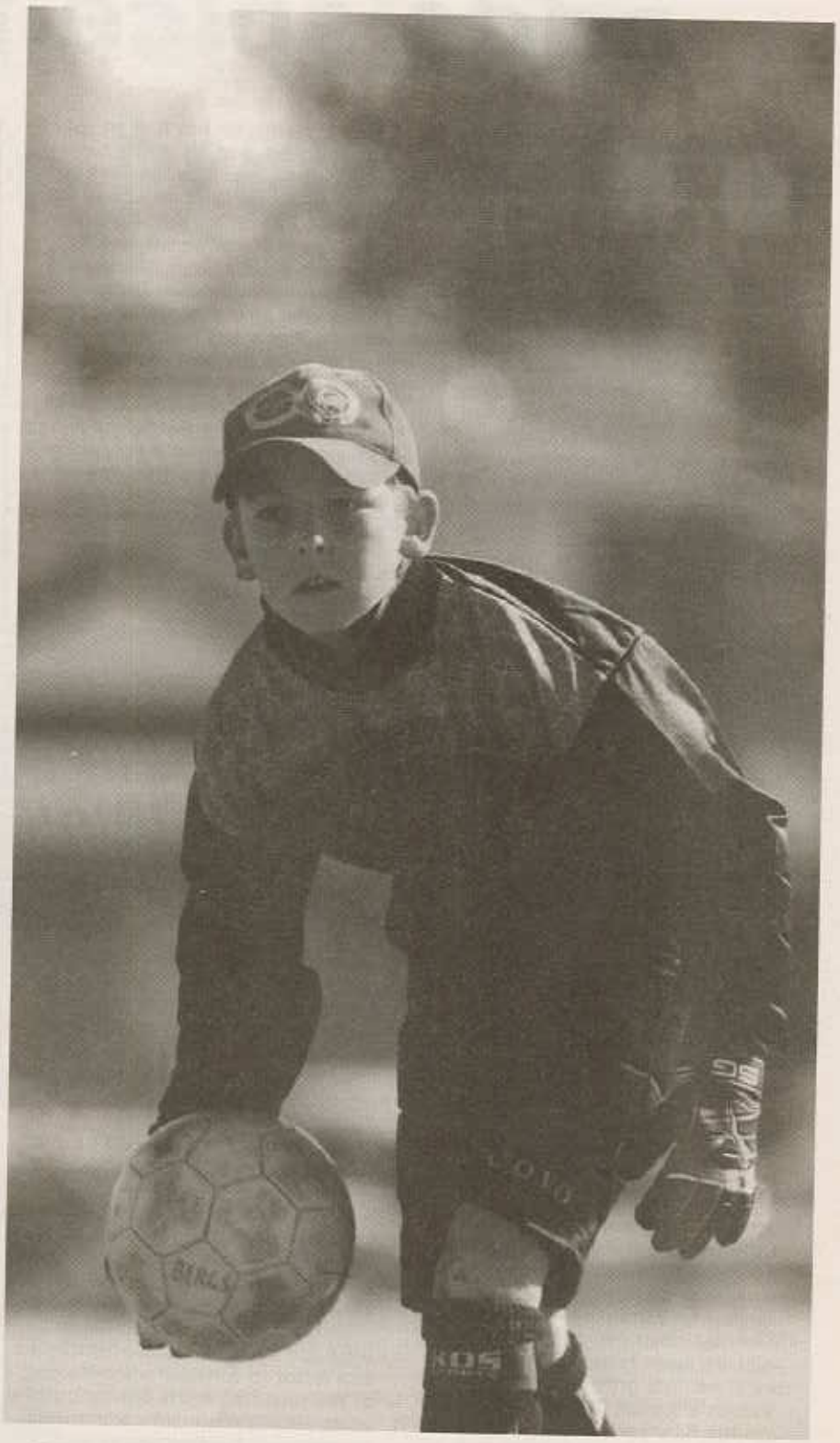
Canterbury 1	Hajduk 1
Fairfield 0	Macarthur 5
Ku-Ring-Gai 0	AC United 4
Bonnyrigg 3	Hills 2
Eastern Subs 0	Mingara 0
Bankstown 0	Newcastle 1

UNDER 15

Canterbury 0	Hajduk 0
Fairfield 3	Macarthur 1
Ku-Ring-Gai 1	AC United 0
Bonnyrigg 1	Hills 2
Eastern Subs 2	Mingara 1
Bankstown 1	Newcastle 0

UNDER 17

Canterbury 1	Hajduk 4
Fiarfield 5	Macarthur 1
Ku-Ring-Gai 4	AC United 1
Bonnyrigg 0	Hills 2
Eastern Subs 2	Mingara 3
Bankstown 3	Newcastle 3



"The 17s are a mixture of 16 and 17 year-olds who we are looking forward to forming the nucleus of the next squad.

"Peter Louis and Don Campbell have put a great deal of effort into these boys to mould them into a competitive outfit, so you should see some improvement."

Demons versus White Eagles Grand Final replay adds spice to play-offs

Blacktown Vs Bonnyrigg

A replay of last season's Grand Final, promises to provide plenty of action and drama.

The Demons have won eight on the trot and are undefeated in their past 13 outings, making them slight favourites going into this one.

The White Eagles, who at one stage looking certainties for back to back titles have been inconsistent in the second half of the season, but did enough to secure second spot on the ladder.

The last time these two sides clashed was in round 19 when the Demons came from behind to win away to the White Eagles.

It was a game in which the visitors, after going a goal down always looked in control of and despite the efforts of the White Eagles midfield never really offered anything in front of goals.

Both sides have a host of experienced big-game players capable of turning the game in a split second.

There are a number of intriguing clashes that add to what is sure to be a classic.

Blacktown's David Reid has been in stunning form in recent weeks is one of several players up against their old club and is sure to produce something from the top shelf.

Gun striker Jimmy Aschner will also be looking for a similar effort, and the former Demon will be assisted by Vuko Tomasevic who would have to rate as being one of the most consistently brilliant players in the league.

Leichhardt Vs Belconnen

Once threatening for Minor Premiership honours Leichhardt's form has fluctuated in the second half of the season, and coming into this finals match the Tigers are without a win in their past two starts.

Beaten by Parramatta last week, these two sides met two weeks ago and both sides failed to find the back of the net in a grinding contest.

Expect a similar battle this week, with the fight taking place in midfield. The likes of the hard working Sam La Rocca and the dangerous Ryan Jones will be looking to gain the ascendancy against high quality Blue Devils midfielders Mike Katz and Shane Lyons.

Katz in particular has had an outstanding year, and his ability to win the ball, and feed it to the likes of Daniel Macor up front could well hold the key.

The Tigers of course will look to evergreen striker Steve Karavatakis for inspiration as well as Derek Poimer who after a sensational start with the Tigers has had little joy in front of goals the past month.

The Blue Devils away form hasn't been the best this season, and with little separating the two teams on paper the home advantage could well see the Tigers live to fight another day.

What the coaches say:

Tony Rassmussen (Penrith)

"I think Parramatta will win it this season, basically because they have the best defence.

"They've been the best team all year and if any team deserves it then they do.

"One team I'd look out for is Blacktown, they've gone on a big undefeated streak, so watch for them coming from behind like Bonnyrigg did last season.

"It wouldn't surprise me to see Blacktown take it out."

Dale Eggleton (Central Coast)

"I think that this is probably the most open finals series in the past three years."

"All five teams are good enough to win it, but if I had to pick I'd go with Parramatta.

"Based on consistency you have to go with Parramatta, they've been the strongest side all year.

"If you were going on momentum you'd have to go with Blacktown, who have done a great job to be in contention, when a lot of people thought they wouldn't even make the finals.

"The fact that Belconnen haven't been too successful away from home, is a factor to consider when looking at the finals, as too is Bonnyrigg who as defending champions won't want to relinquish the title too easily."

Craig Sharpley (Fairfield)

"Parramatta are the best side and have been by far and away the best team all year.

"But anything can happen in finals, with both Blacktown and Bonnyrigg two scary sides that can win it.

"I don't think the other two will threaten, but like I said it's finals football and anything can happen."

THE BRIAN BROWN COLUMN

Nothing minor about winning Minor Premiership

ANOTHER home and away season is finished with the Parramatta Melita Eagles taking out the Minor Premiership.

I can't quite understand why it's called the Minor Premiership as there is nothing minor about finishing on top of 12 other teams in the competition.

There is no doubt in my mind that the team who wins the league has won something major, not minor.

It has been a good year for teams at the top of the ladder with Parramatta and Bonnyrigg fighting for the top spot, while the rest were looking to cement a finals position.

The interest levels would've been far greater had their been a promotion and relegation system in place, making sure that every game during the run home has some significance.

There is a new competition now with the finals beginning, five teams all looking to play in the Grand Final.

Blacktown face our major rivals Bonnyrigg on Sunday at the Serbian Centre and I'm sure the game will produce attacking football, goals and plenty of fierce tackles.

The other match between Belconnen and Leichhardt will be another cracker with both teams well aware that they only have one chance. I think Belconnen might just get up as the Tigers are sure to miss Steve Livingstone who has been rock solid for them all season at the heart of their defence. It will be very tight as both teams are very competitive and give nothing away.

Finals football is a different challenge and teams with finals experience will do well. Blacktown, Bonnyrigg and Parramatta have all played in Grand Finals in the past four years and it's my tip that two out of these three will make up this years final.

COACHES who criticise referees need to take a good hard look at themselves.

I was down at Greystanes last Saturday morning watching my son play for Hills United against Greystanes under 13s.

The officials didn't show so a parent from both sides were asked to referee a half each. I got the jersey for the Hills side and controlled the second half of the match.

I made a couple of decisions that were challenged by the Greystanes coach.

I gave an offside decision that was marginal, but nevertheless was offside, and then got copped an onslaught from the coach.

I told him to shut up, he kept going, so I then stopped the game and gave him a talking, after which I continued the game.

After the match he came over to me and apologised and I also apologised to him.

What was all the fuss about?

So much for a relaxing Saturday morning watching the kids play. The referees have a tough enough job to do at any level and don't intentionally try to make a mistake, it just happens, they call it the way they see it.

I remember when I was playing for Brunswick Juventus about 15 years ago in the National League at Olympic Park in Melbourne.

Chris Bambridge was the referee and after about 10 minutes I questioned one of his decisions with a few four letter words.

He ignored me.

Ten minutes later I questioned another one of his decisions with a few more four letter words.

Again he ignored me.

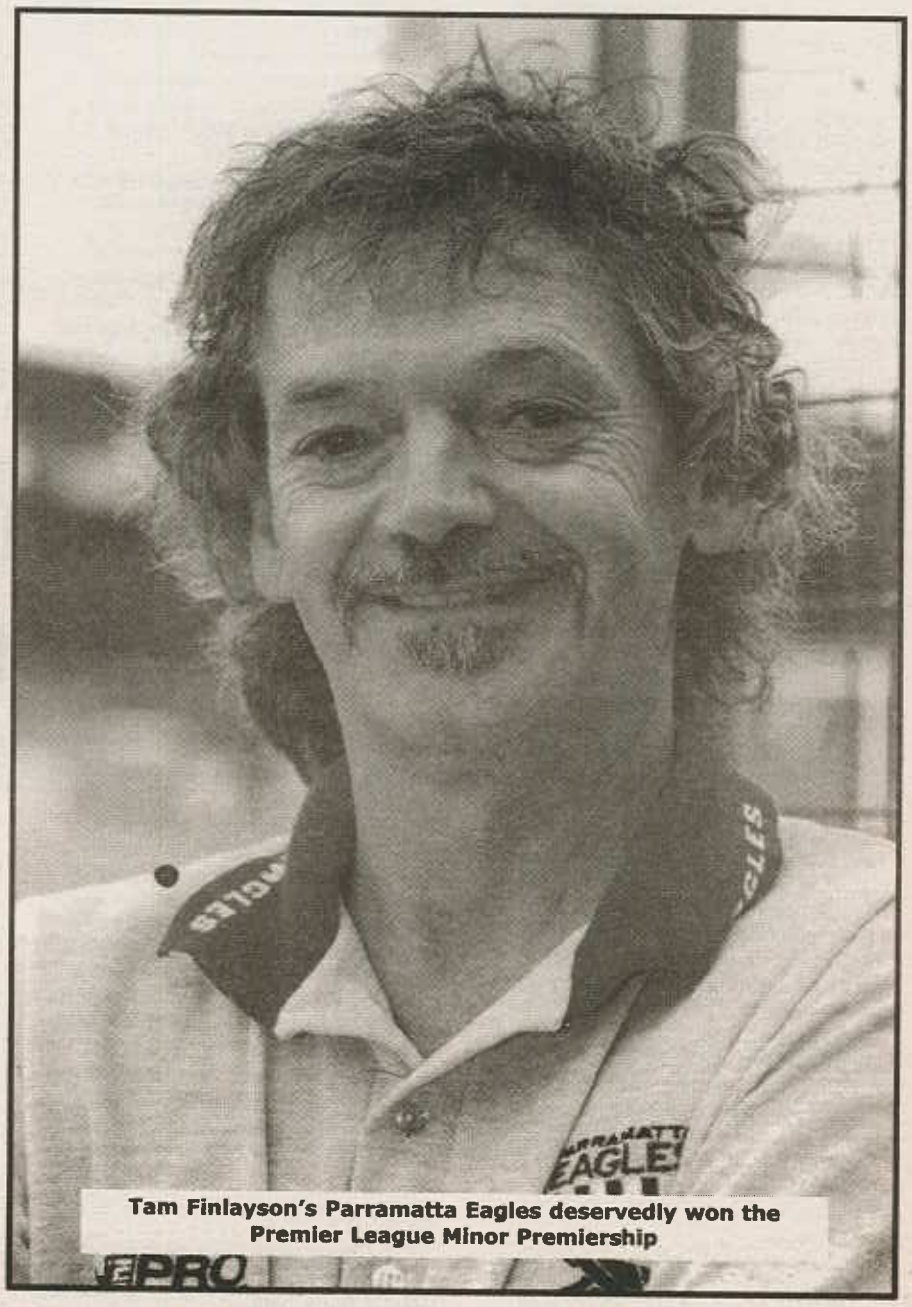
A few minutes later he ran past me and whispered in my ear, "I can make mistakes like everyone else, get off my case.

"If I criticised you for every bad pass you made I wouldn't be able to referee."

He made a great point and certainly shut me up.

I had so much respect for him after that and never moaned or complained (well not too much).

Now as a coach I also try to follow that thought.



Tam Finlayson's Parramatta Eagles deservedly won the Premier League Minor Premiership

Good communication does work, and is something that needs to be furthered between coaches, players and officials.

High flying Hawks impress in opening rounds

By Mick CHILI

THE Stanmore Hawks are one of the Super League high-flyers after an impressive start to their campaign.

With the experience and skill of veterans Eric Hristodolou, Tom Pontidas and Peter Papoythis the Hawks were always going to be a tough adversary.

But it hasn't just been the guidance of the older brigade steering the Stanmore ship, but the performances of several unknown youngsters that have taken the Hawks game to that next level.

"I really have to give credit to guys like Greg Baldock and Steven Leavas who have just been sensational for us," coach Chris Karasis tells Soccer Today.

"I expect guys like Hristodolou and Pontidas to who have great games, but it's really been the efforts of the other guys such as Baldock and Leavas who have given us much more.

"At the start of the season, Eric (Hristodolou) didn't even know who these guys were and now they can't get enough of each other."

After a rosy start, the Hawks are looking to prosper even more throughout the season.

It won't get any easier however, with rivals no longer under-estimating their strengths and plenty of tough games ahead, including Rockdale and AC United in the upcoming two weeks.

This should give a better indication of just how far the Hawks can go this season, and despite the start Karasis is still keeping his feet firmly planted on the ground.

"It's been fantastic so far, but it's still very early," he says.

"Probably the only disappointing thing at this stage, has been the news of other clubs still bringing in players to their squads.

"We can't really afford to be doing that, but on the other hand at least we'll have stability."

It's a common feature in competitions to see the sides impress early on and then falter towards the later stages when the pressure and games get tighter.

One of the main goals of the Hawks is to remain consistent and stay positive no matter what the outcome of the matches are.

"I think we can sustain it, and I'd be absolutely shattered if we didn't make the Top Five," Karasis admits.

"I try to keep the boys happy and I've taken them out to restaurants and on a harbour cruise.

"I've been around for a while and I've never been at a club where it's like this at the moment, it's just buzzing.

"My only fear would be injuries to key players, because our squad isn't as deep as some of the others."

But unlike other clubs there is a lot less pressure on the Hawks to succeed this season.

"You expect teams like Rockdale to win the competition with the money they've spent," says Karasis.

"We don't have any pressure and if we can make the finals then that's great, but there's no expectation."

Karasis role at the Hawks hasn't been a lone one and he has had plenty of support from the football committee who have entrusted the former Apia-Leichhardt and Sydney Olympic midfielder with their on-field success this season.

"At first it was difficult, because I'm a very stubborn person when I believe in something" Karasis comments.

"At first I didn't know too much about the committee, and they didn't know too much about the things that I wanted to do.

"But once they said to me that I can bring in who I want, and giving me full control things have gone really well.

"You have to pay credit to the board. They're a young committee and at the same time very passionate and switched on."

The Hawks have also received great support from their supporters this season, keen to cash in on their good form.

"We got between 450 to 500 people attend our first home game, whereas last year we probably would've got about 150," Karasis says.

"At half-time against Ryde City the boys got a standing ovation. We're playing an attractive style of game, knocking the ball around and can score from just about anywhere."

Rockdale 19s humming along nicely

By Adam LETO

ROCKDALE City Suns have for the past few seasons been regarded as a club that brazenly attempts to use a cheque book to buy a premiership.

Contradicting that theory has been the form of their 19s who reflect Rockdale's approach to bringing up their own junior players through the playing ranks.

With the 19s and 21s training together, it's a simple case of monitoring each players progress to decide who plays in what grade.

"Out of the 30 players about 20 of them are under 19 years of age," explains Rockdale Football Manager Bill Pilovski.

"People say that we don't look after our younger players, but if you look at the squad, you'll see that it's all about promoting the younger boys."

The 19s have made a promising start to the season winning three and drawing the other in their four matches to date.

Their first round draw against a more than solid Sydney University side was flooded with missed opportunities, with their most impressive win being a 3-2 clash against Ryde City, which showcased the talent on both sides.

The young Suns are yet to fully reach their potential, and so far their clashes with mid table to potential finalists, hasn't classified them as potential champions just yet.

They will have to wait until round 11 to face a truer test of their mettle when they battle with current league leaders and traditional rivals Dulwich Hill.

" The guys work very hard together as a team, and the standard at this level is fairly high.

"We drew with Sydney Uni in a game where we had plenty of chances, but just couldn't capitalise.

"And against AC United we were leading 3-0 but just let them back into the game with silly mistakes, but still ended up winning 3-2."

Coached by Bill Boskovski, they have a number of players who have shown plenty of promise.

"Peter Malakovski is a very good player, as to is Andrew Mendes, who could end up being even better then his brother (Jose).

"Sasa Stevski, is another who at just 17 is playing with the 21s.

"Overall they're all a very good bunch of boys, and we're expecting big things.

The development of the juniors is keeping with the Suns main goal of gaining promotion to the Premier League.

"I think we deserve to be in the Premier League," Pilovski says.

"Without being degrading other clubs, I think we could play in the Premier League and not just stay in the competition surviving.

"We deserve to be there and whether it be next year or the year after, we will get there eventually and that's our main aim."

Results Super League Under 19s

Round 4

Manly-Wgah 3	Hajduk W 1
Ryde City 3	Macarthur 2
Dulwich Hill 2	Fraser Park 1
Sydney University 2	Stanmore 1
HC Crescent Star 1	AC United 5
Rockdale 4	MSC Liverpool 2

This Week:

Macarthur v Dulwich Hill
MSC Liverpool v AC United
Hajduk W v Ryde City
Fraser Park v Sydney University
Stanmore v Rockdale
Manly-Wgah v HC Crescent Star

Peter Tsolakis leading Port Melbourne's title challenge

By Melina BOURSINOS

A PICTURE can say a thousand words. It captures a moment, a second in time, it represents emotions which can not be described and it is what memories are made of.

Well, my favourite sporting photo is of five South Melbourne players piled on top of each other after a goal.

It is simple, yet effective. When looking at it you can see the happiness, the relief of each individual and you can almost feel the intensity of the match. At the bottom of that pile with one leg sticking out, is Peter Tsolakis. He is one of those players who you can miss if you blink, but he has always had the ability to produce the magic that turns teams inside out.

"I grew up watching dad play at Middle Park in the 60's and as soon as I could walk he gave me a soccer ball. I progressed through from the under 9's to the senior squad when I was 17," he explains.

It was not long before the pint size midfielder was snapped up by National League club Heidelberg United. After 3 years his career took an unexpected turn when Berger's coach Brian Garvey moved to South Melbourne and took the pint sized midfielder with him. This was a dream come true and "Gus" as he was known, became a part of what is now considered as one of "Hellas" greatest ever teams. His rocket like shots and his unbelievable speed were the trademark of his game and once he was on the attack he was simply unstoppable.

"Playing at South is my greatest achievement. It's something every kid wants to do. We had a good bunch of boys down at South. I had grown up with Joe Palatsides, Mehmet Durakovic, Mike Petersen and Michael Michalakopoulos. We were all friends, we all played for each other and we really bonded together."

As he reflects on his days at the top, he talks about the memorable 1991 grand final. He believes that the key to the team's success was their understanding and determination. He continues by saying that back in the 'good old days," you had to fight for your position and you felt privileged to be pulling on a first team guernsey.

"I think it was a lot harder for us back then. We had to compete with the Scots and the Poms. It was really tough and very intense. There is a lot more opportunities for young kids now. At the same time the standard has dropped quite a bit, because so many players are leaving for overseas," he comments.

Frank Arok is someone that you either love or hate. He has a history of being ruthless and when he arrived at South Melbourne he lived up to his reputation.

The Yugoslav born coach was known for disliking short players and sure enough the "little dynamo" as he had been nicknamed, became one of a long list of players who have been sacked because they were vertically challenged. However he didn't let this setback stop him from doing the one thing he loved and he returned to the club where he first became a star.

"Look I had problems with South Melbourne, when I said I was going to Heidelberg. I think that's when they really made it difficult. But after that I sorted it out. It was good to go back there. They were great and we had a good team. But unfortunately we got relegated the following year,"

When I ask him about his next major move, he begins to laugh.

"This is going to sound really funny," he says

"But I played for a club called Malacca. It's in Malaysia and I played there for a season. The standard is probably equivalent to our Premier League, but there is a lot more money involved in the game there and the crowds are a lot bigger," he continues.

Shortly after he returned home and signed with the Collingwood Warriors. However, luck was not on his side when he injured himself in pre season training and was required to have a knee reconstruction. After a year's rest he decided to continue playing at Port Melbourne where he first kicked a soccer ball. He was welcomed back with open arms and once again became the favourite son of the club.

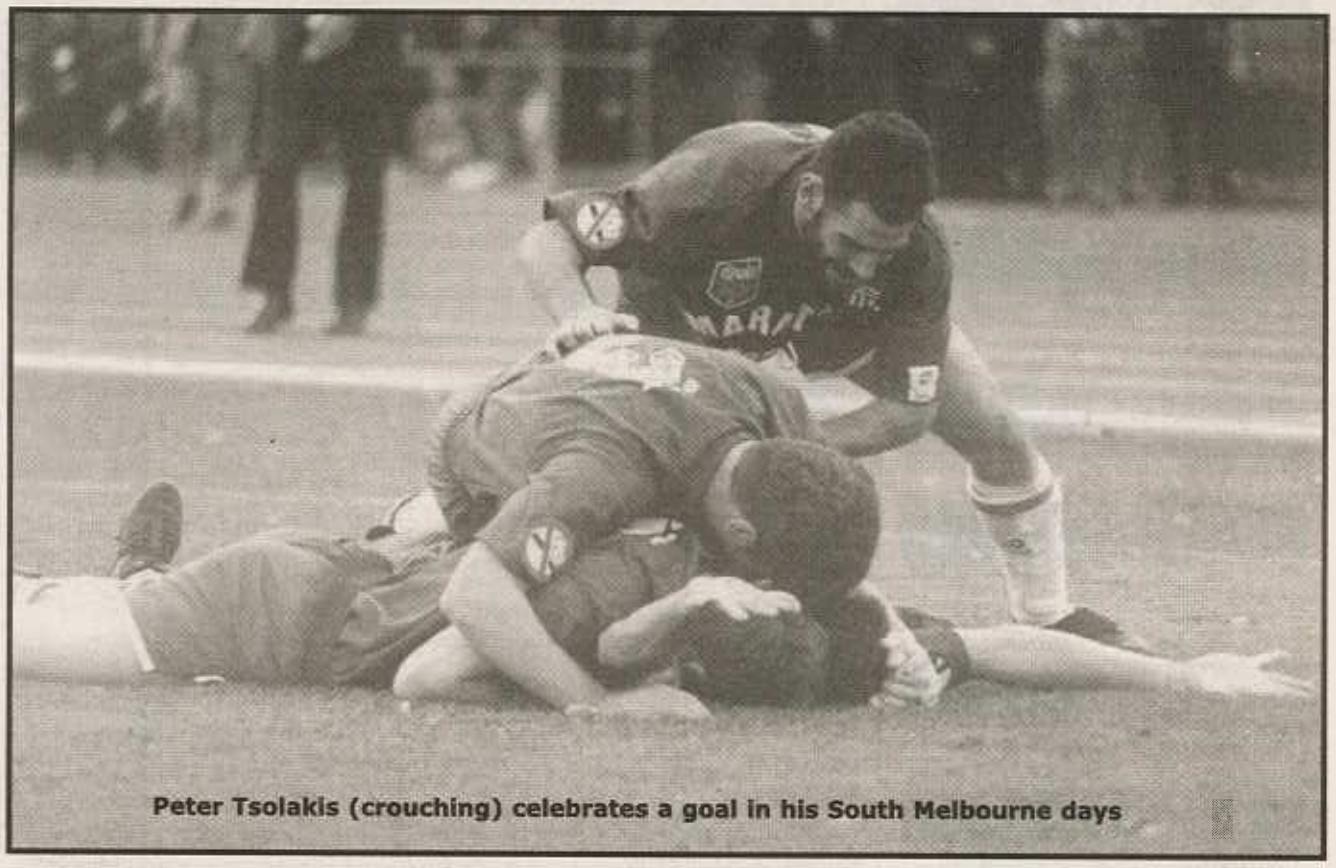
"I decided to play for Port and I had a good year but after one season I injured my other knee and needed another reconstruction.

Alan Davidson had been appointed coach for the following season, but he received a job offer in Malaysia and the boys wanted me to coach. Since I wasn't doing anything I was kind of pushed into the position. But I also enjoyed it."

The 36 year old is no longer coaching, but has played an integral role in the Shark's success this season, leading the team to first position with his knowledge and experience. He is still as ambitious and passionate as ever and as always he will just wait and see what direction his life will take.

"I would like to keep playing as long as I can, but I definitely want to coach one day as well."

In Victorian Premier League action last weekend, the Bentleigh Greens and Green Gully continued their winning ways and remain in equal top place on 18 points and four points clear of three teams on 14. Bentleigh defeated Altona Magic 2 0, with the goals scored by T. Karapatsos and A. Motsiopoulos.



Peter Tsolakis (crouching) celebrates a goal in his South Melbourne days

Green Gully Cavaliers came away with a 2 0 victory over the Fawkner Blues. Goalscorers for the Cavaliers were I. Kutlesovski and M. Trupkovic.

Altona East Phoenix defeated Whittlesea Stallions 4 1 on Monday April 1 in the only game on that weekend in the split round of round 8.

Preston Lions and Port Melbourne Sharks drew 1 1 at BT Connor Reserve, with goals scored by N. Cuculeski for the Lions and J. Pappas for the Sharks.

Max Cuze scored for the St Albans Saints in their 1 0 victory over Fitzroy City at Churchill Reserve.

Peter Kakos scored for Heidelberg, but State Team squad members Sava Rusmir and Brendan Sakaci scored for Bulleen to make the final score 2 1 to the Zebras.

NSL SCOREBOARD

SOUTH 3

C Boutsianis 41'/55' V Coveny 83'

STALLIONS 1

S Webb 86'

Referee: Mark Shield

South: 1 M Petkovic (gk) 2 S Iosifidis 3 F De Amicis 4 M Durakovic 7 S Panopoulos 8 V Coveny 9 Paul Trimboli (-74') 12 Radomir Sekulovski (-85') 16 Massimo Murdocca 19 P Kisnorbo 25 C Boutsianis (-85') Subs: 11 J Bacak (+74') 21 V Lia (+85') 26 N Sabljak (+85') 23 E Galekovic (gk)
Stallions: 1 M Turnbull (gk) (-81') 2 M lBeauchamp 4 A Costanzo 5 D Longo 6 C Care 11 N Tome 13 S Webb 16 R Bove (-07') 17 J Afkos 22 A Brosque 23 C Gibson Subs: 12 S Bozinovski 14 E Anabalon (+68') 18 S Radulovic (+07' -68') 30 B Catlin (gk) (+81') **Crowd**: 9,063 **Venue**: Bob Jane Stadium

POWER 3

B Holman 16' pen D Brown 21'
A Kwasnik 54'

KNIGHTS 0

Referee: Con Diomis

Power:L Reddy (gk) 2 D Barrett 3 M Langdon (-82') 5 A Tobin 7 W O'Sullivan 11 D Brown 16 B Holman 21 A Elrich (-46') 22 J Vrkic 24 S Eagleton (-60') 28 P Bennett Subs: 8 M Thompson (+60') 19 J Buonavoglia (+82') 27 A Kwasnik (+46') 1 L Pogliacomi (gk)
Knights: 30 D McGrath (gk) 2 J Rajher 3 R Vargas 8 K Marusic (-78') 9 J Porter 10 A Da Costa 11 X Sulemani (-60') 13 I Jolic 14 D Piorkowski 16 A Kiratzoglou (-72') 18 A Vargas Subs: 12 B Ovcin (+72') 15 D Debevc (+78') 19 A Pelikan (+60') 1 M John (gk) **Crowd:** 2,733 **Venue:** Parramatta Stadium

SPIRIT 5

S Dobbie 14' A Griffiths 32'
P Cardozo 45'/89'

WOLVES 2

S Young 18'
P Reid 33'
Referee: Brett Hugo

Spirit: 30 J Rex (gk) 3 S Bell 4 N Spencer 5 R Trajkovski (-85') 6 S Thomas (-85') 8 C Foster 10 P Cardozo 13 M Stergiopoulos 14 M Cartwright 16 S Dobbie 21 A Griffiths (-90') Subs: 7 A McDermott (+85') 12 J Hutchinson (+85') 19 R Griffiths (+90') 20 P Henderson (gk)
Wolves: 1 D Anastasiadis (gk) (-09') 2 G Souris (-46') 3 A Ceccoli 4 R Stanton 7 P Reid 10 S Young 11 N Sekulovski (-46') 13 C Anthopoulos 17 B Blake 24 D Wells 25 G Sharland Subs: 6 A Castro (+46') 15 D Huxley (+46') 19 T Perinich 31 J Pasfield (gk) (+09') **Crowd:** 2,925 **Venue:** North Sydney Oval

STRIKERS 1

K Trajanovski 19'

GLORY 1

B Despotovski 37' pen

Referee: Matthew Breeze

Strikers: 1 J Kearton (gk) 2 R Alagich 3 S Stefanutto 4 J McKain 5 S McLaren (-64') 7 F Rech 8 A Webber 10 K Trajanovski 11 J Carbone (-80') 15 M McKay 18 L Drake (-70') Subs: 6 P Grierson (+64') 13 W Heath (+70') 19 J Rose (+80') 20 C Baldock (gk)
Perth: 1 J Petkovic (gk) 2 M Horsley 5 C Deans 8 B Maloney (-64') 10 B Despotovski 11 M Garcia (-86') 12 B Hassell (-83') 15 E Aldrighi Junior 16 D Mori 18 S Pryce 23 D Tarka Subs: 6 G Naven (+83') 9 A Edwards (+64') 14 D Valle (+86') 20 T Franken (gk)
Crowd: 4,508 **Venue:** Ballymore

ADELAIDE 1

A Vidmar 20'

Adelaide: 1 A Cagalj (gk) 2 M Kemp 3 I Fyfe 4 A Kovacevic 7 L Pantelis 10 A Vidmar 12 S Tunbridge (-69') 13 K Rees 14 A Goulding (-87') 18 I Karlovic 23 N Budin Subs: 9 R Saraceno (+69') 19 P Mercurio 21 A Pellegrino (+87') 20 D Godley (gk)
United: 28 V Knezevic (gk) 3 V Savoca 12 B Santalab 13 A Deur (-85') 14 G Talevski 16 C Menapi 17 P Bilokapic 18 D Watkins 21 M Jedinak 22 M Bosnar 29 C Cevenini (-46') Subs: 6 M Cunico (+85') 23 M Cindric 24 S Sinozic (+46')
Crowd: 3,500 **Venue**: Hindmarsh Stadium

SYDNEY UTD 2

B Santalab 14' M Jedinak 66'
Referee: Craig Zetter

OLYMPIC 5

A Milicic 19'/27'/57'/84'
D MacAllister 91+

KINGZ 2

C Banks 39' A Vlahos 55'

Referee: Simon Micallef

Olympic: 1 C Bolton (gk) 2 S Laybutt (-60') 4 P Kohler 6 W Srhoj (-60') 7 L Wilson 8 T Pondeljak 9 D Macallister 11 J North 19 A Milicic 23 A Packer (-78') 28 A Juric Subs: 12 E Augerinos (+78') 14 G Owens (+60') 16 J Harris (+60') 30 B Hughes (gk)
Kingz: 1 M Theoklitos (gk) 2 J Perry 11 A Vlahos 12 H Ngata (-71') 13 J Campbell 14 J Markovski (-46') 15 M Burton 17 R Hooker 21 R Van Steeden (-61') 22 C Banks 24 C Jackson Subs: 4 Levent Osman (+71') 9 P Urlovic (+46') 23 C Wylie (+61') 19 H Miyazawa (gk)
Crowd: 3,614 **Venue:** Toyota Park

NEWCASTLE

BYE

NATIONAL SOCCER LEAGUE: Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
1 Perth Glory	24	16	7	1	52	23	55
2 Newcastle United	24	10	12	2	33	21	42
3 Olympic Sharks	24	12	4	8	37	24	40
4 Brisbane Strikers	24	10	7	7	40	33	37
5 South Melbourne	24	10	6	8	30	22	36
6 Melbourne Knights	24	11	3	10	41	40	36
7 Parramatta Power	24	10	4	10	34	30	34
8 Northern Spirit	24	9	7	8	36	39	34
9 Marconi Stallions	24	8	6	10	32	36	30
10 Wollongong Wolves	24	6	7	11	28	43	25
11 Sydney United	24	6	6	12	27	37	24
12 Adelaide City Force	24	4	8	12	27	39	20
13 Kingz FC	24	3	5	16	28	58	14

LEADING SCORERS

17	MORI Damian	Perth Glory
15	MILICIC Ante	Olympic Sharks
14	CARDOZO Pablo	Spirit
13	FOSTER Paul	Brisbane Strikers
12	DESPOTOVSKI Bobby	Perth Glory
11	BROWNLIE Royce	Marconi
11	DA COSTA Antonio	Knights
12	DESPOTOVSKI Bobby	Perth Glory
15	MILICIC Ante	Olympic Sharks
11	PORTER Joel	Knights
10	GRIFFITHS Joel	Newcastle
9	MOREIRA Alex	Newcastle
9	RECH Fernando	Brisbane Strikers
9	URLOVIC Paul	Kingz FC
9	YOUNG Stuart	Wolves
8	MENAPI Commins	Sydney United
7	BOUTSIANIS Con	South
7	COVENY Vaughan	South
7	MALONEY Brad	Perth Glory
7	TUNBRIDGE Scott	Adelaide City
6	MACALLISTER Dylan	Olympic
6	MAISANO John	Marconi
6	TOME Norman	Marconi
6	TRAJANOVSKI Kris	Brisbane Strikers
5	BUONAVOGLIA John	Power
5	CERVINSKI Adrian	Spirit
5	HOLMAN Brett	Power
5	MASI Esala	Newcastle
5	PONDELJAK Tom	Olympic
5	VLAHOS Andy	Kingz FC
4	BAIRD Michael	Strikers
4	CARBONE John	Strikers
4	DE JESUS Ivo	Knights
4	HARNWELL Jamie	Perth Glory
4	MIDDLEBY Robbie	Newcastle
4	NGATA Heremaia	Kingz FC
4	TRIMBOLI Paul	South
3	ARAMBASIC Zlatko	Power
3	BACAK Joe	South
3	CARLE Nick	Olympic
3	DEUR Ante	Sydney United
3	GOUTZIOULIS George	Kingz FC
3	GULESSARIAN Kevo	Stallions
3	HUTCHINSON John	Spirit
3	MARTH Andrew	Knights
3	MCBREEN Daniel	Newcastle

Miraculous recovery could see Baggio available for Italian duty

FORMER Italy international Roberto Baggio could be in line for a shock comeback for his club this season and might be in the running for Italy's World Cup squad, according to Brescia president Gino Corioni.

Brescia forward Baggio injured his knee ligaments in an Italian Cup match against Parma in January and doctors predicted he would be out of action for the rest of the season.

But Corioni says Baggio, 35, has made a miraculous recovery.

"Baggio wants to play against Inter (Milan) on Sunday or go on the bench," Corioni was quoted as saying in Tuesday's Corriere Dello Sport newspaper.

"Think: two and a half months ago he had an operation on his cruciate knee ligaments and normally it would take six to eight months to return to the field. He is well. It is extraordinary."

The paper said Baggio was unlikely to figure this weekend although he could be back in action in time for Italian coach Giovanni Trapattoni to give him a glance before finalising Italy's World Cup squad.

"It's true that at the end of the season, in the last or the penultimate game, Baggio will be on the pitch and will be in the thoughts of Trapattoni," Corioni said.

Brescia have struggled in the absence of former European player of the year Baggio, who has scored eight goals this season, and they currently lie one place above the relegation zone on goal difference.

Baggio played in the last three World Cups, making his mark at the 1990 tournament on home soil with a fine individual strike against Czechoslovakia before leading the Azzurri to third place.

In 1994, he missed the crucial penalty in the shootout in the final against Brazil, and was a surprise inclusion in the 1998 World Cup squad. He did not make the Italian squad for Euro 2000.

Reuters

Romario again misses the cut as World Cup hopes fade

FORMER national hero Romario looks to have lost his last chance to be picked for Brazil's World Cup squad after coach Luis Scolari left him off the team list to face Portugal next week.

Appeals had been made across Brazil for Romario to be included for the finals in Japan and South Korea but Scolari's latest gesture seems to have condemned Vasco de Gama's 36-year-old prolific goalscorer to staying at home this summer.

Brazil will travel to Lisbon for the pre-World Cup friendly on April 17 - after that the team will have only one more friendly, against a Catalan select, in which to hone their team before flying off to Asia.

The chances of Romario, who was the hero of Brazil's 1994 World Cup campaign but who is regarded as controversial because of his apparent love of life off the park, now being called up look extremely slim.

Scolari's determination to leave him off the team comes despite a tearful appeal by the player himself last week, and calls for Romario to be called up by Brazilian federation (CBF) president Ricardo Teixeira on Monday.

Teixeira said in 13 years at the helm of the CBF he had never heard a complaint against the 1994 World Cup star, who missed the 1998 finals through injury and is desperate to play this time.

"In all these years, I have never heard of any problems with Romario at any level," Teixeira told Jovem Pan radio station.

"And, as CBF president, I consider myself a well-informed person."

Instead, Scolari has included two new faces in the squad of players he announced here on Tuesday - Fluminense defender Paulo Cesar and Romario's club teammate Euller.

Today's announcement by Scolari involved only those players playing for Brazilian clubs, the coach having announced last week his selection of players plying their trade in Europe.

Squad:

Goalkeepers: Marcos (Palmeiras/Bra), Rogerio Ceni (Sao Paulo/Bra)

Defenders: Anderson Polga (Gremio/Bra), Cafu (AS Roma/Ita), Junior (Parma/Ita), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid/Spa), Roque Junior (AC Milan/Ita), Lucio (Bayer Leverkusen/Ger), Edmilson (Lyon/Fra)

Midfield: Gilberto Silva (Atletico Mineiro/Bra), Kleberson (Atletico Paranaense/Bra), Juninho Paulista (Flamengo/Bra), Emerson (AS Roma/Ita), Rivaldo (Barcelona/Spa), Djalminha (Deportivo La Coruna/Spa)

Forwards: Edilson Cruzeiro/Bra), Luizao (Gremio/Bra), Ronaldo (Inter Milan/Ita), Ronaldinho Gaucho (Paris St Germain/Fra), Denilson (Real Betis/Spa)

AFP

2002 could be the 'cleanest' World Cup Finals ever

It seems the recent "tossers" campaign that has hit our screens lately to prevent smokers from flicking their cigarette butts onto the roads or sidewalks is a main focus for World Cup organisers also.

There are currently two official World Cup ashtrays available for sale in Japan, and it's not an uncommon site to see the immaculate Japanese smokers walking the streets of Tokyo with ashtrays in hand to avoid not only their butts hitting the ground but also their ash.

If this isn't the best World Cup, then it's sure to be the cleanest.

CELTIC DELIGHTED WITH 38TH SCOTTISH CHAMPIONSHIP

By Phil GORDON

GLASGOW, Scotland - Glasgow Celtic manager Martin O'Neill hailed his team after it sealed a 38th Scottish championship on the weekend, declaring it a more fulfilling experience than winning last season's title.

The 5-1 thrashing of Livingston at Celtic Park wrapped up a second successive Scottish crown for the Glasgow club with four games to spare, as it took an unassailable 16-point lead over arch-rivals Rangers.

O'Neill, whose arrival at Celtic in June 2000 wrested power from their Old Firm neighbours, stated that his team's remarkable run - which has seen it lose only one of 34 league games - has made this triumph sweeter than his first one, which broke Rangers' stranglehold.

"It's a greater achievement," O'Neill said.

"Last year was great, but to retain it was magnificent, especially when you consider our Champions League involvement.

"To drop only nine points is fantastic.

"Rangers never gave up the chase, and that it took us until the fifth last game to seal the title with our record, shows Rangers' consistency as well."

Celtic is on course to achieve the championship with the fewest points - and goals - conceded in Scottish football history.

But it was the strike force of Henrik Larsson and John Hartson who grabbed the glory to prompt a giant party from the 59,752 fans inside Celtic Park.

Larsson scored a hat-trick which took his total for the season to 35 in all competitions, increasing last year's European golden boot winner's haul to 88 goals in the last two seasons.

Hartson, scored twice in the first half to take his total to 21.

Larsson opened the scoring after just two minutes, steering in a right-foot shot from eight metres from Paul Lambert's cutback, before Hartson increased the lead on 19 minutes with a fierce volley from Didier Agathe's pass.

Hartson and Larsson added headers on 25 and 33 minutes, respectively, both finishing off crosses by Steve Guppy, before Larsson put away a left-foot finish from another Lambert cutback in 59 minutes, which rang up the Swedish international's 100th league goal in just five seasons at Celtic.

Livingston forward Barry Wilson struck a consolation for the fourth-placed side in 72 minutes but nothing could take the shine off Celtic's day.

"You never get tired of winning this," Larsson said.

"This is what you set out to do at the start of the season.

Celtic boss Martin O'Neill is getting used to winning trophies

Torino under investigation

MILAN, Italy - The Italian Football Federation (FIGC) is to look into media claims that a Torino player may have told a team-mate to deliberately concede a goal during yesterday's 1-1 draw with Bologna in Serie A. Italian television channel Tele Piu showed footage of a conversation between Torino defenders Fabio Galante and Daniele Delli Carri immediately prior to Bologna's 51st-minute equaliser.

Commentators suggested that a lip-reading of part of the conversation could indicate that Galante was instructing Delli Carri to allow Bologna to score.

The claim has been rejected by players and officials of both teams.

Torino led until six minutes into the second half when Bologna's Argentine striker Julio Cruz latched on to a high ball into the box, after losing his marker Delli Carri, and fired home.

The Italian news agency ANSA reported today that Italo Pappa, head of the FIGC's office of investigation, intended to meet the two players to clear up the matter.

"We have only to ascertain what the two players said," Pappa was quoted as saying by ANSA.

"We are vigilant about everything that happens on the field," added Pappa, who said he was ready to meet the Torino pair tomorrow if they were available.

Galante told Italian television that the claim should not be taken seriously.

"Do you honestly think that in a game where we needed three points to be mathematically safe from relegation I could have said such a thing? I hope that no-one really thinks that," Galante told RAI television.

Bologna coach Francesco Guidolin also dismissed the claims.

"We tried to win in every possible way and at the end of the game we were on our knees," he said.

Bologna is fourth in Serie A and has a chance to qualify for the Champions League for the first time in its history.

But it's only one point ahead of fifth-placed AC Milan and two clear of Chievo who are sixth.

Torino is eighth in the 18-team Serie A.

Reuters

SOCCER TODAY!
is produced weekly on Thursdays
by
ROYAL PUBLISHING
Suite 12 3A Railway Pde
Kogarah
NSW 2217
AUSTRALIA

POSTAL ADDRESS:
PO Box 566
Kogarah
NSW 2217
AUSTRALIA

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DISTRIBUTION:
WRAPAWAY
02 9550 1622

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THE FINAL WHISTLE!

It's a good thing the Kingz aren't taking legal action

It's a shame the National League Finals race has been somewhat overshadowed by the Con Boutsianis affair.

The constant reference to his fallout with the Football Kingz and the subsequent dust-up between Boutsianis and the Kingz GM Chris Turner.

Thankfully the Kingz on Tuesday decided against taking any legal action against South Melbourne over the Boutsianis transfer.

Turner, who is also bidding to become the Auckland-based franchise's owner, backed down at the 11th hour.

The gist of the situation is this:

The Kingz say they released Boutsianis on the proviso that he didn't play against them in February.

But for some reason South included the Socceroo striker in their lineup.

Boutsianis scored a goal and since then, South has made a miraculous charge to the Finals, where they are a serious threat to favourites Perth Glory.

Boutsianis has been on fire since then and his goals have been a key element in South's remarkable turn-around from also-rans to title contenders.

The Kingz are unhappy that after initially being charged by the NSL with bringing the game into disrepute, South was found to have no case to answer when Soccer Australia stepped in and closed the matter.

The governing body added at the time of its finding that it was an issue to be sorted out by the two clubs, not the league, and since then the Kingz have several times threatened to issue legal proceedings.

If South was to lose the three points it gained in the match against the Kingz it would have tipped out of the finals in favour of the Parramatta Power.

Turner said he wasn't in the business of disrupting the Finals because "it's no skin off our nose whether South Melbourne, Parramatta or whoever makes the finals because we weren't good enough to get in ourselves.

"But the issue is that a club played a player they shouldn't have played and the correct process of going to a tribunal hasn't taken place.

"Why has this not been addressed? This issue has to be addressed."

Thankfully the issue will not affect the Finals and this weekend's Melbourne double featuring the Knights versus Olympic and South versus Brisbane, should provide fans with plenty of entertainment.

Or at least I hope so.

I went along to the Northern Spirit versus Wollongong Wolves game last Sunday and it was a terrific match.

A beautiful sunny afternoon, plenty of goals - and they were all quality goals, too - and end-to-end action, what more could a football supporter ask for?

Apparently it was the same at Parramatta Stadium, where the Power dusted the Knights 3-0.

But then again, both matches had a common thread,, there was no real pressure on the players to perform.

Power and Spirit knew they had missed the cut for the Top Six, the Wolves had been out of contention for weeks and the Knights knew they were assured of a place in the semis.

But it produced excellent football and it's a real shame these teams can't play with such verve and panache throughout the entire season.

If they did, then people would flock to the grounds to see some scintillating action, not two teams playing safe in the hope of not losing.

There simply wouldn't be a seat in the house.

Maybe that's what coaches should consider before the new season begins.

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newsagencies every Thursday

THE WOMEN'S GAME

Proudly brought to you by SOCCER TODAY

NAOMI may be one of the youngest Sharkettes but she is also quite a talented performer. She has tap danced at the Olympics, starred in a national-winning Rock Eisteddford production and competed as a swimmer for her district. Oh, and then there's the small matter of being a member of the most popular cheer squad in the country. Derek Royal spoke to the 17-year-old ...

Words: Derek Royal
Pictures: Tina Asprea

AT 17, Naomi is one of the youngest Sharkettes.

She still attends Engadine High School and she has a passion to entertain and to perform.

Naomi remembers when she was a wee lass and seeing the Cronulla Sharks' Rugby League cheerleaders - known throughout the land as the Mermaids - and virtually on-the-spot decided that she would one day love to join them.

But obviously, it's not a simple case of rolling up and paying a rego fee, there's the small matter of serious training, talent, athleticism and those horrid things known as auditions.

But Naomi was determined to give it a shot and with two of her dance teachers already in the squad, she received plenty of encouragement to do so.

"Tara and Melanie are my dance teachers and they're also in the squad so I decided to have a go," she says.

"I love to dance and I love to perform and I thought this would be a fun thing to do."

And fun it is.

Naomi loves the camaraderie and the friendships she has developed with the other girls just as much as the performing side.

But she concedes that there is *one* minor drawback.

"Because I'm so young it's hard because all the other girls get to go out to clubs and all that sort of thing," Naomi says with a laugh.

"But my time will come I guess."

And what does she remember about the first audition?

"I remember I was really nervous," she says.

"But after a while I settled down and made the team."

The Sharkettes rehearse once a week, usually Mondays, and they do a bit of fine-tuning on game day.

Once that's over, they're on their own.

So what goes through Naomi's mind when just moments before a big game she's in the tunnel waiting to enter the cauldron?

"I look at the crowd to see how full the stands are," she says.

"And I try to remember the dance!"

When asked where she would like this cheerleading gig to eventually take her, Naomi said that she dreams of being a dancer.

"I love to perform," she says.

"And I really love dancing, especially jazz.

"I'd love to be a jazz dancer."

Naomi says that she started dancing when she was "about seven, I was in Year Three at school", unlike most other dancers, who she says "normally start at the age of two or three."

Naomi is also something of a water-baby.

She has represented her region at state swimming carnivals and enjoys playing water polo.

She is also a real beach girl.

"Yeah, I love going to the beach, and I just love the water."

But apart from all that, Naomi also experienced performing at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

So how did that come about?

"It was a thing for schools and they wanted dancers who could tap," she says.

"It was a great experience."

It seems that Naomi has had quite a few "great experiences".

Apart from all the abovementioned achievements, she also revealed that she played the lead role in her high school's Rock Eisteddford.

And guess where they came at the nationals?

"I played the main part in the production and we won the nationals," she says with a shrug and a grin.

Any other surprises, Naomi?

"Um, no, not that I can think of one," she says.

One surprise is that she won't be performing at the Eisteddford's this year, just isn't enough time in the day to do *everything*.

But that hasn't stopped her from making a good fist of it so far.

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